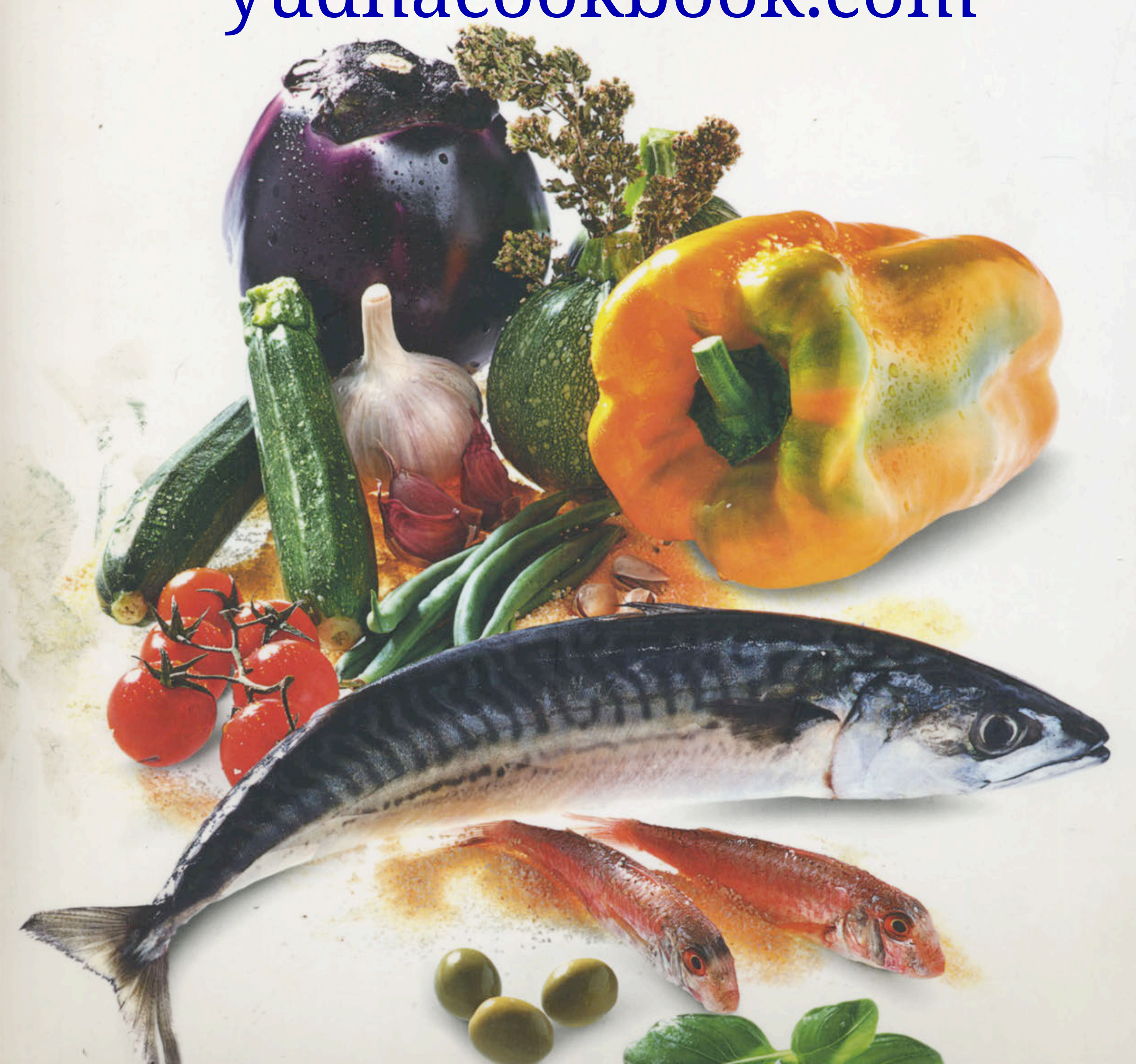
MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE

Secrets from Coastal Italian Kitchens

EDITED BY ACADEMIA BARILLA

PREFACE BY TODD ENGLISH

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This volume was realized in close collaboration with the Academia Barilla, an institution founded for the purpose of defending, regulating the quality of, and diffusing typical products of Italian gastronomy. It is dedicated to those who would like to learn the secrets of the true "Mediterranean diet," a highly refined and appreciated nutritional model for those who want to match the pleasures of the table with correct and healthful nourishment. In leafing through the 120 recipes presented, covering all types of dishes (from antipasti to desserts, from first courses to pizzas and focaccias, and on to second course dishes of meat and fish), the reader can "savor" the countless expressions of Mediterranean cuisine. Starting with the triad of grains/vegetables/oil, which remains constant, each culture of the Mediterranean basin has throughout millennia of history distilled its own elementary model, typical and distinctive. Owing to the historical and anthropological richness that distinguishes it even today, Italy has succeeded in expressing the Mediterranean model in an infinity of recipes and typical dishes, making the Italian gastronomical tradition unmistakable and inimitable. Eating "Italian style" thus becomes not only a proper and healthful living habit, but above all, an occasion to savor this exquisite tradition of the Bel Paese.

MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE

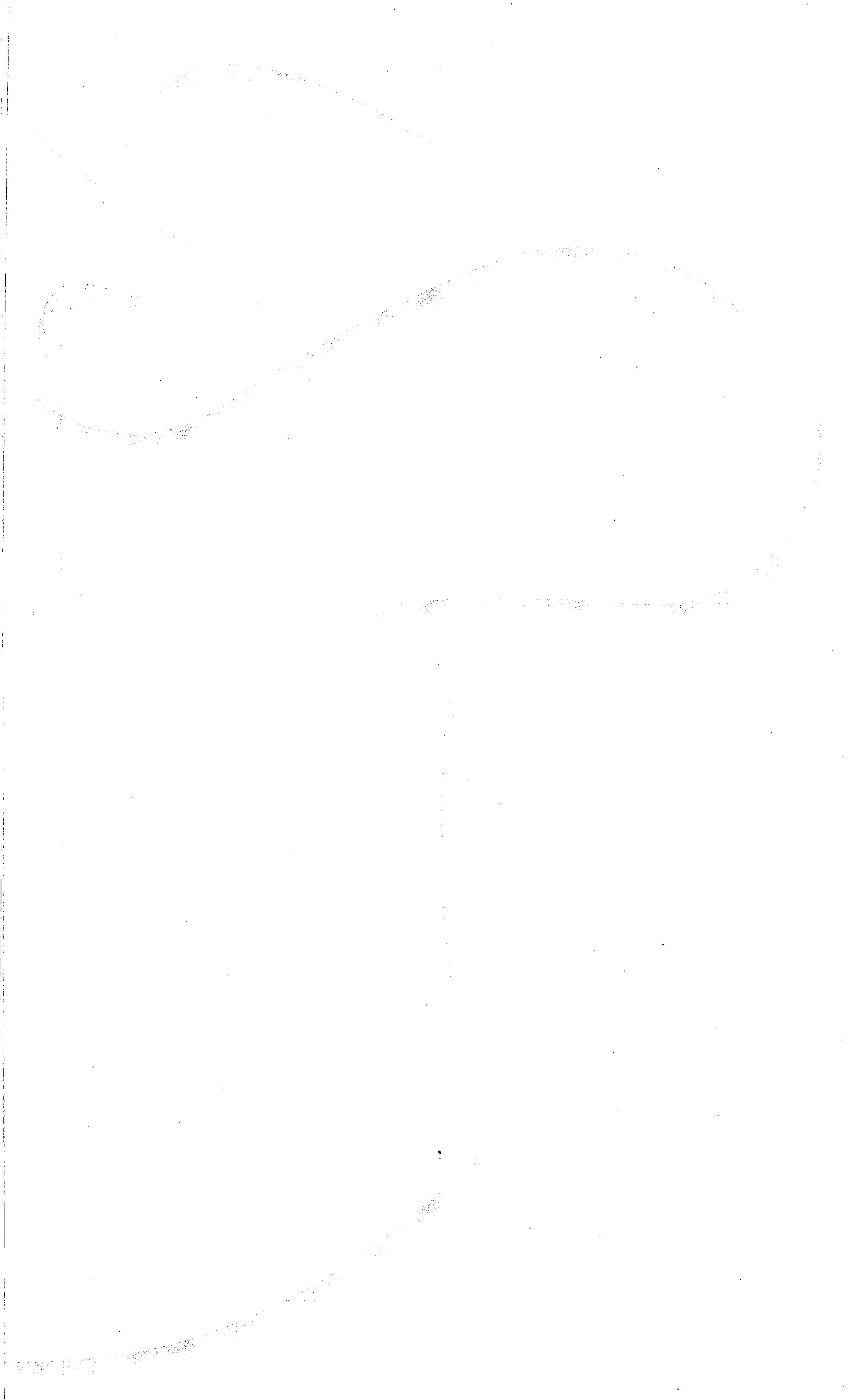
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HUMAN CULTURES AND THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

The close relationship between diet and health was demonstrated by scientific studies in the late 1950s which found that Italian dietary habits presented a balanced model that could prevent the cardiovascular problems typical of more "evolved" societies.

Thus the term "Mediterranean diet" was born. It did not refer to a certain gastronomic unity but rather to the presence of certain basic ingredients used by all cultures that developed near the sea (olives, grains, vegetables, fish, grapes) and which gave rise to a myriad of gastronomic efforts that were well-balanced in terms of both nutrition and environmental sustainability.

The Barilla family has been involved in the art of working with flour since the 16th century, with the baker Ovidius, and is part of an unbroken line that bears a love for wheat and the results of its transformation, which is deeply rooted in the aforementioned Mediterranean diet.

When Pietro Barilla Sr. opened his first bread and pasta store in 1877, thus founding our company, he laid the groundwork for production practices (now over a century old) that would be set apart by attention to quality, the absence of additives and preservatives, the use of the best technology and consideration for people's health.

The company has continued to adhere to those standards, following an ancient tradition that places wheat among the most important ingredients in the Mediterranean diet which, upon further reflection, could perhaps be better defined as the "Mediterranean food culture." It is a culture that's not limited to food but rather extends to social customs and lifestyles.

Thanks to the work of many generations, the cultivation of food products has actually transformed the landscapes of Mediterranean countries. Wheat, tomatoes, olives and grape vines are the "markers" of the precious natural elements that still characterize our hills and plains in a perfect environmental balance that has been preserved for millennia. But they also carry meanings far beyond the material world. They are tied to religious beliefs and their associated rites, to conviviality and to the very identities of people and places.



This reminds us that behind every flavor there is a long history of conquests, practical skills, inventions and meanings that often transcend culinary limits and enter the social and cultural spheres. Together, all of this knowledge gives us an idea of the true value those flavors have acquired.

The Barilla name has been associated with wheat and pasta for over a century. Through hard work and determination it has contributed to the overall value of Italian culinary culture. We dutifully dedicate these pages to the Mediterranean diet – not just the recipes, but the meanings and traditions – with the belief that a proper lifestyle and a healthy diet contribute to one's individual health and to the well-being of society.

Guido, Luca and Paolo Barilla

ACADEMIA BARILLA

ITALIAN GASTRONOMY AMBASSADOR TO THE WORLD

At Academia Barilla, tradition and innovation come together in a unique organization that was created to promote and defend Italian gastronomic culture throughout the world. The futuristic Academia Barilla, designed by internationally famed architect Renzo Piano, is located in the middle of the Barilla Center. The spectacular kitchen-auditorium is surrounded by a multi-sensory laboratory, various classrooms equipped with the most modern technology for didactic instruction and practical application, an internal restaurant, and the vast Gastronomic Library, which houses a collection of over 10,000 volumes in addition to valuable historic menus and gastronomic prints. Academia Barilla was designed for the express purpose of responding to the need for professional culinary training. Through the highly qualified professional staff of internationally renowned chefs and selected guest chefs, the center is able to offer a variety of courses in terms of both subject matter and skill level, including short-term courses, conferences, and lectures. Academia Barilla is also at the center of gastronomic tours organized in a region of Italy that boasts some of the best, most well-known traditional products in the world: Parmigiano-Reggiano, prosciutto di Parma, salami, culatello, pastas, etc. But above all, Academia Barilla is committed to safeguarding the high quality products that are so abundant in Italy. The center chooses and distributes a wide variety of enogastronomic specialties with the highest quality standards. These products are made by small artisanal companies and selected by eminent chefs and experts in order to distribute them throughout the world and introduce them to places beyond the narrow confines of the area of production. Academia Barilla also organizes cultural events that are open to the general public, and produces publications and television programs that spread knowledge about Italian products thanks to the valuable participation of experts, chefs, and food critics. The center has even made it possible to access the contents of the Gastronomic Library through the internet, from the print and menu collections to hundreds of digitized historical texts that can be perused online, in order to make this cultural heritage of gastronomic proportions available anywhere. The efforts of Academia Barilla are deeply rooted in the Barilla family's dedication to food products for over 130 years, and their passion for a unique land where beauty and good taste have lived in harmony for centuries.

Gianluigi Zenti


Todd English

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QUEEN OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

In November 2010, UNESCO added the Mediterranean diet to its intangible cultural heritage list. This honor recognizes and affirms the universal value of a lifestyle that's existed for millennia and should be safeguarded and promoted. The word "diet" is of Greek origin and it implies a web of meanings that go well beyond simple nutrition and sustenance in the literal sense. It evokes the history of entire populations, material culture, land preservation, biodiversity, the social and ritual aspects of food and standards of lifestyle and behavior.

In this sense, the Mediterranean diet functions as a link between past and present, becoming a sort of guide for modern people who want to gain awareness and reestablish an honest relationship with food, return to a more balanced lifestyle with more natural rhythms and develop healthier and more pleasurable eating habits. It encourages people to once again look at meals as a social activity rather than a gastronomic one and to consider the sharing of food as a tangible manifestation of affection, values and meaningful interpersonal relationships.

It's impossible to find a homogenous gastronomic system that extends throughout the Mediterranean and includes recognizable dishes that are the same everywhere. But behind the varied cooking traditions, there lies a clearly visible gastronomic macrosystem – a common nutritional and dietary structure in which the same basic ingredients (grains, olive oil, vegetables, dairy products, fish) are utilized in numerous ways, taking on different textures, shapes and flavors. A dietary model does exist above all the local variations, and in Italy it's used to its maximum potential.

Similar climactic conditions – modest rainfall, precipitation that's mostly concentrated in the fall and winter and summers that are long, hot and dry – are the true link between various cultural and geographical regions of the Mediterranean basin. There are three ecosystems associated with the climate which are somewhat complementary and often coexist in the same region or a relatively short distance apart: The sea and the continental



plateau, the coastal plains or plains close to bodies of water, and the valleys between the mountains and hills. Constant trade and commerce between widely differing areas was the final factor that determined the particularity of the Mediterranean diet and made it so distinct. Of course it was all done with the utmost respect for the terrain and the natural length of time required for maturation or production.

From this perspective, Italian cuisine rises to the top as "queen" of all Mediterranean cuisines. In addition to its geomorphological wealth, Italy's particular history – which paradoxically led to cultural, artistic and culinary success – made Italian gastronomy (especially in the southern regions) heterogeneous, multi-faceted, diversified and capable of almost infinite variations on a relatively small and limited range of products.

Love for food, respect and caring for the land, imagination, and the ability to utilize every taste and ingredient to its fullest potential – all these things were cemented over centuries, giving rise to a cultural and material wealth of recipes, traditional products and delicacies that are incomparable on a worldwide scale.

By its current definition, the Mediterranean diet was discovered by American physiologist Ancel Keys in the late 1950s. Noting the low incidence of cardiovascular disease in Mediterranean countries, he concentrated on the correlation between diet and health, scientifically proving in the famous Seven Countries Study the importance of diet in preventing physiological illness.

Many subsequent studies have confirmed and reinforced the validity of the American doctor's instinct. A recent paper titled *Alimentazione e Salute* (Diet and Health), published by the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition, effectively illustrates the link between the dietary regimes of various human populations and the incidence of chronic illness related to being overweight or even obese. A more recent series of studies has further demonstrated the existence of a close relationship between life expectancy and dietary habits.

By now it's clear that choosing a diet in keeping with the Mediterranean model and adopting a healthier lifestyle can lessen the risk of developing even the most dangerous diseases. There is yet another advantage that should not be overlooked regarding the taste and aesthetic appeal of food. The Mediterranean diet has great potential for diversity and allows for a wide range of cooking methods and combinations of colors, textures and fragrances. It's easily adapted to individual tastes and keeps monotony (and sadness) away from the table. It also provides a way to discover new flavors or rediscover ancient


ACADEMIA BARILLA

COMMON INGREDIENTS IN UNCOMMON WAYS

The Mediterranean lifestyle has always held a powerful allure for me, evoking images of seaside breezes, simple ingredients, flowing red wine and joyful gatherings of family and friends around the table. This is a cuisine that has captivated and inspired me for decades with its boldly flavorful palate, countless regional variations, and of course, healthful dietary balance. Yet it is its flexibility that has truly allowed the chef in me to thrive. Relying on nothing but the freshest ingredients, exotic spices and flavors and unique cooking techniques, this is a cuisine that begs any cook to experiment, to play, to interpret, and, above all, to discover.

My cooking philosophy has always been to use "common ingredients in uncommon ways." There are few other cuisines that lend themselves more naturally to this than Mediterranean, with its delicious staples such as olive oil, pasta, seafood, vegetables and olives. But any great meal must begin with the freshest, highest quality ingredients.

For well over a century and throughout four generations of family ownership, Barilla has led the industry with its unwavering care and dedication to quality and authenticity. I am honored to be working with Academia Barilla and know that you have an incredible culinary adventure ahead of you.

TODD ENGLISH

ones, and above all it can be followed and reinterpreted almost anywhere in the world.

The basic model is actually very simple and flexible: A base of grains (preferably whole grains, which can be eaten in the form of pasta, flour, polenta, couscous or simply steamed) combined with large amounts of whatever fruits and vegetables are in season. This can be enhanced with a modest quantity of dairy products, eggs, fish, meat (preferably white) or legumes (a well known characteristic of the diet and a great source of vegetable protein). Small quantities of dried fruit can be included as well to add to the flavor and nutritional value of certain dishes. Finally, extra-virgin olive oil is the undisputed leader when it comes to condiments and fats for cooking. As mentioned earlier, the array of possible combinations is truly extensive. Furthermore, the proportions of the various elements are perfectly in keeping with the famous food pyramid, a graphic designed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1992 to give a clear, effective and intuitive representation of how daily meals should be structured.

There is another factor that has emerged in recent years and can no longer be ignored, which is the ecological footprint of all food production, or more precisely the specific environmental impact of each sector. Many studies have been done regarding this issue and the conclusion is clear: When we choose mainly plants (grains, fruits and vegetables), we're acting with responsibility and respect toward the earth because agriculture, especially when it's traditional and non-intensive, has a lower impact on non-renewable resources than breeding. Plus, compared to animal products, plant products are much more functional and efficient in terms of converting energy.

Even in terms of productivity and conserving energy resources, the Mediterranean diet is a good choice. Our health is closely linked to that of our planet, and if we place the food pyramid next to the environmental one, which illustrates the effects of various production sectors on the ecosystem, we see that they are inversely proportional. What's proven to be best for our well-being also does less damage to the earth (for further reading, we recommend *Water Management* and *Climate Change, Agriculture and Food*, published by the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition in 2009).

The research conducted by Doctor Keys brought the validity of the Mediterranean dietary model to the attention of the international scientific community, but it also directed attention away from the diet's true origins and historical motivations. In fact, the Mediterranean has never been a "garden of earthly delights," though a superficial analysis might lead one to that definition. Over millennia, the interaction of particular climatic, geological,



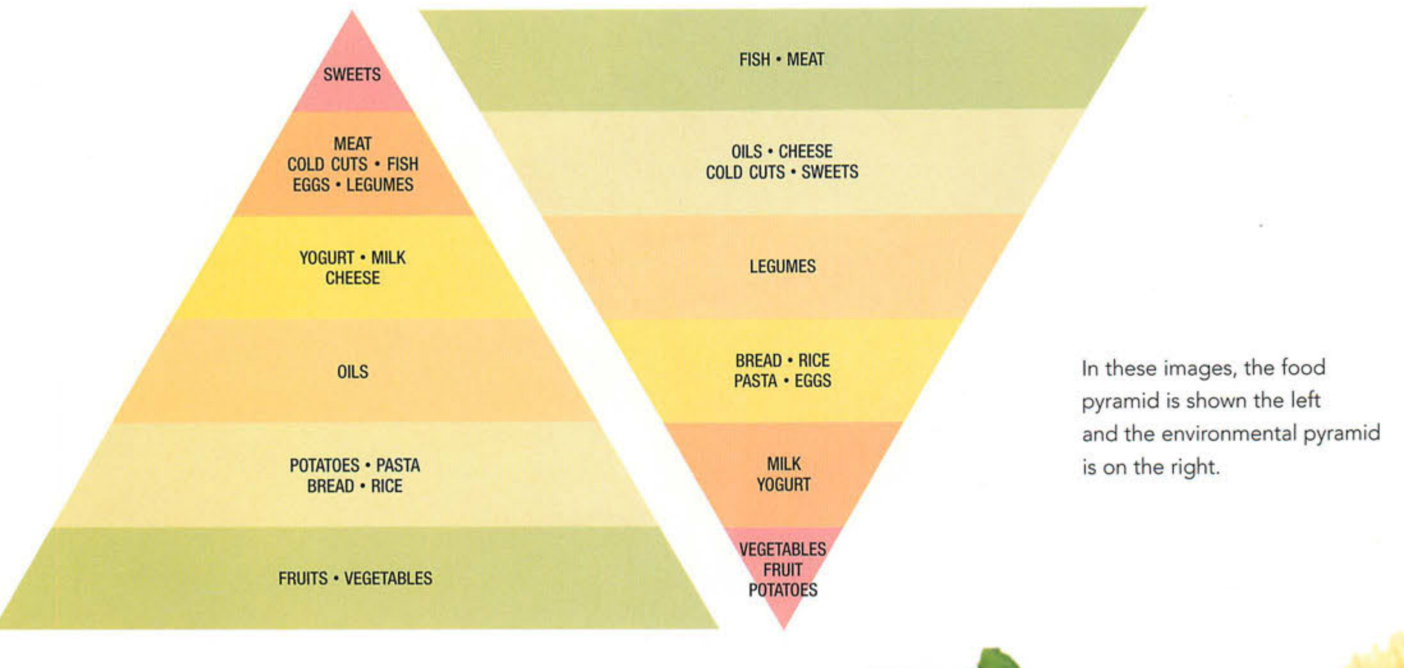
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economic and social factors has led to culinary customs characterized by simplicity, sobriety and frugality, not to mention genuine misery. It was the poor who ate "Mediterranean style" while the upper classes never went without red meat and fattening delicacies, which were anything but healthy.

Over millennia, the Mediterranean cultures (especially that of Italy, which was characterized by diversification and an unparalleled cultural history) incorporated a highly symbolic and ritual dimension to their meals that is being progressively and irretrievably lost in modernity. Even the way we eat and come together at the table, in terms of timing and human interaction, seems less important and less healthy. An "Italian style" meal is still attractive for this very reason – the added value of the rich history and meaning that it carries. This book was conceived with the intention of uniting, perhaps for the first time, a selection of the best recipes – both traditional and contemporary, but either way entirely Mediterranean – with a series of in-depth explanations that bring to light the extra meaning that so often remains concealed, unexpressed or even overshadowed by the taste.

Though science proved the nutritional value of the Mediterranean diet, the credit for creating it and developing it over the centuries must go to the people who lived on this land, with their ancient knowledge and stubborn pride. In that sense, southern Italy demonstrates the country's culinary creativity particularly well. Sampling certain dishes is like being immersed in a melting pot of tastes, stories, aromas and flavors.

Rediscovering local recipes without knowing their true roots, or choosing them for nutritional reasons alone, would be in vain. It makes sense to refer to the teachings of the past and revive them with understanding; to grasp the meaning of a tradition, follow it and reinterpret it, adapting it to the times we live in. Because the history of the Mediterranean and its extraordinary gastronomic culture is still being made today.



In these images, the food pyramid is shown the left and the environmental pyramid is on the right.

THE FOOD PYRAMID AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PYRAMID

The food pyramid was created to present a healthy and balanced nutritional model that everyone could refer to on a daily basis, and today it's an iconic image of the Mediterranean diet.

Simple, effective and easy to read, this graphic illustrates the various food groups that are essential to the body and places them on six levels. At the base are fruits and vegetables, which are very low in calories, but they still provide water, mineral salts, vitamins, and fiber (necessary for the digestive system to function properly). Grains, or foods that are high in carbohydrates (wheat, pasta, bread), are at the second level and are a central pillar of the Mediterranean diet. The third level contains condiments and fats used for cooking, generally olive oil (a treasured signature product of the Mediterranean). The fourth level, which is noticeably smaller, contains yogurt, milk, and cheese. Meat (mostly white), eggs, legumes, and fish occupy the next level. Along with dairy products, they represent the dietary protein requirement. Even at a glance, it's clear that these foods should be consumed far less than those from the vegetable and grain categories, and that portions should be carefully controlled. Sweets and fats are at the very top and should only be eaten on occasion. These six levels should be included in the daily diet of each adult individual and consumed according to the proportions displayed in the food pyramid. It's model that's easy to follow, providing the guidelines and gustatory inspiration for managing dietary habits.

It must be noted that relying predominantly on one or more foods from the same group should be avoided, as frequent variation is important for a proper diet that's both healthy and enjoyable. Seasonality is another factor that should not be overlooked. It's associated with a higher respect for the area of production, not to mention the integrity of a more authentic taste.

The environmental pyramid explains the ecological impact (referred to as the "ecological footprint") of food production in simple, clear terms, and it's easy to see that it's inversely proportional to the food pyramid. This means that the healthiest, most balanced choices for our bodies correspond almost perfectly to those that are best for protecting the environment and the earth we live on.

APPETIZERS



Every menu, in a restaurant or otherwise, begins with the word "Appetizers." There are hundreds of dishes that can fall under this heading because of their cultural, ethnic or social significance, the origin of their ingredients (sea or land), their place in gastronomic tradition or their innovative and experimental nature. Today the appetizer category is virtually all-encompassing and embraces a wide range of dishes and food products.

But upon reflection, the word for "appetizer" in various European languages might lead to a change in perspective. The Italian word *antipasto* (literally, "before the meal") emphasizes the chronological progression of a meal, while the French *hors d'œuvre* (which can only be considered a synonym for "appetizer" from the 17th century on) highlights the hierarchical relationship between various courses. And the English "appetizer" stresses its function and purpose within the meal – stimulating the appetite. Even the gastronomic lexicon can reflect a nation's culinary philosophy.

Continuing along the same path, two other things should be noted. The first is socio-economic in nature: In the past, the presentation of a meal over multiple courses was a luxury that only a miniscule percentage of the population could afford, and even today it's only reserved for certain contexts and special occasions. The second is of a more historical and gastronomic nature and concerns the structure of dinner (meaning the banquet-like meal that exists in every era and every culture). After the opulent and luxurious French service, where guests could be served numerous dishes repeatedly and simultaneously and which was divided into "buffet service" (cold food) and "kitchen service" (hot food) was replaced with the more rational and rigid Russian service, where the order and content of the courses was already established, appetizers really began to find their place.

The category still remains open and in flux, and it lends itself more than any other to discussion, reinterpretation, love and revile. Today it can even be the protagonist of a meal (in the event of a buffet), an informal snack among friends or an Italian *aperitivo* (pre-dinner cocktail).

The secret to appetizers' longevity surely lies in their incredible versatility. They can be simple preserves, cold cuts, fresh or aged cheeses, vegetable delicacies or elaborate presentations of savory pastries. They can have their roots firmly planted in tradition or stem from the latest culinary trend. In any case, appetizers continue to work their charm and function as the first, appetite-whetting invitation to experience the extraordinary world of Italian gastronomy.



ACCIUGHE FRITTE

ANCHOVIES WITH TOMATOES, CAPERS AND TAGGIASCA OLIVES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

0.88 lbs (400 g) anchovies
3 eggs
1/3 cup (50 g) Italian "00" flour
2 3/4 cups (300 g) breadcrumbs
Extra-virgin olive oil for frying
Salt to taste

Method

Clean the anchovies, removing the head, innards and bones. Slice them in half lengthwise and open them up, then rinse and dry them. Dredge the anchovies in the flour, then dip them in the beaten egg and coat them with breadcrumbs.

Fry them in boiling oil and remove them with a perforated spoon. Place them on paper towels to dry and sprinkle them with salt.

Serve them in cones or pouches of paper or foil.

FRIED ANCHOVIES

A recent rise in the popularity of finger food, coupled with the trend of offering a buffet of appetizers as part of the Italian aperitivo (pre-dinner cocktail), has been partially responsible for a return to simple, traditional foods. One of these foods is fried anchovies served in a foil pouch, a delicious snack to fish out with your fingers and munch. Selling foods that are easy to eat, even while walking, is one of the oldest forms of catering. It's closely tied to marketplaces, streets and ports – crossroads for long-distance trading.



ALICI MARINATE AGLI AGRUMI CON INSALATA DI FINOCCHI

CITRUS-MARINATED ANCHOVIES WITH FENNEL SALAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30' (preparation: 30 minutes) + 1 day to marinate

1.3 lbs (600 g) fresh anchovies
1.5 lbs (700 g) fennel (about 3 bulbs)
1 orange
1 lemon
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 sprig of thyme
1 sprig of wild fennel
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean the anchovies, removing the bones and innards. Peel the lemon and orange with a potato peeler, making sure you don't include any of the white part, and mince the peel. Strip the thyme from the stem and roughly chop the wild fennel.

Arrange half the herbs in the bottom of a container. Add the minced citrus peel and a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil. Place the anchovies on top. Cover them with the remaining herbs, the juice of the orange and lemon and a pinch of salt and pepper. Let the anchovies marinate for a full day in the refrigerator.

Clean the fennel and slice it thinly. Rinse it well in cold water and strain it.

MARINATING

Food preparation doesn't necessarily mean cooking, even in the Italian tradition, and marinating is one example. A marinade is a sort of sauce in which foods are left to soak for a long time, sometimes for a whole day. The presence of acidic ingredients (vinegar, citrus juices or alcoholic beverages) transforms the flavor, consistency and appearance of the food so that it's almost been "cold-cooked." This process is typical of Italian gastronomy, whether it's merely the preliminary phase of a more complicated recipe or simply a single food preparation step. It's a very ancient method that was created to extend the shelf life of food items, but it continues to be part of the Mediterranean tradition today because of its irrefutable value in terms of taste and nutrition.



ARANCINI DI RISO CON SCAMORZA E CROSTA DI NOCCIOLE

HAZELNUT-CRUSTED RICE FRITTERS WITH SCAMORZA

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

8.8 oz (250 g) rice (about 1 1/3 cups)
3.5 oz (100 g) smoked scamorza
3/4 cup + 1 tbsp (100 g) flour
1 3/4 cups + 1 tbsp (200 g) breadcrumbs
3.5 oz (100 g) crushed hazelnuts (about 2 cups)
3 eggs
2 tbsp (30 g) butter
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (40 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
6 1/3 cups (1.5 L) beef broth
Olive oil for frying

Method

Boil the rice in the broth and strain it when it's al dente. Stir in the egg, butter and grated Parmigiano and let it cool.

Form balls of rice (about the size of a ping pong ball), placing a piece of scamorza in the center of each one.

Coat the rice balls in flour, then dip them in the beaten egg, then coat them in a mixture of breadcrumbs and crushed hazelnuts. Fry them in a large amount of boiling oil and remove them with a perforated spoon. Place them on paper towels to dry, then serve them.

ARANCINI

Human ingenuity manifests itself in many ways, and arancini *(rice fritters) clearly prove this in terms of gastronomy. The Arabs, who introduced rice cultivation to Spain and Sicily (the grain was largely ignored by the Greek and Latin gastronomic cultures), traditionally served large trays of rice seasoned with precious saffron and accompanied by vegetables or meat stews at banquets. Guests could easily reach these delicacies by extending their hand. Culinary history has the wonderful ability to teach us that the best inventions are often the result of two seemingly irreconcilable cultures coming together. That's how this culinary custom spread throughout Sicily and led to the need or desire (perhaps at the time of Federico II) for a "rice fritter" that was available any time, even while traveling. A handful of seasoned rice was shaped into a ball, cone, or oval, and the condiments evolved into endless local variations, some heavier and some lighter, based on taste and economic means. But the true stroke of Italian genius (which unites the palate with common sense) was coating the rice in breadcrumbs and frying it. The* arancini *became individual containers of flavor and fragrance encased in a crispy, golden shell. Most importantly, they were long-lasting and easily transported, ready for any occasion.*



BICCHIERINI DI GELATINA DI POMODORO CON BURRATA E PESTO

SMALL GLASSES OF TOMATO JELLY WITH BURRATA CHEESE AND PESTO

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30' + 2 h to set (preparation: 30 minutes)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) ripe tomatoes (about 5 1/2 large)
3.5 oz (100 g) burrata cheese
4-5 gelatin sheets
Pesto to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

PESTO
0.5 oz (15 g) basil (about 30 leaves)
1/3 cup (30 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
3 tbsp (20 g) Pecorino cheese, grated
0.3 oz (8 g) pine nuts (about 1 tbsp)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Ligurian
Half a garlic clove

Method

Wash and dry the basil for the pesto. Combine it with the other ingredients in a mortar and crush them all together. Transfer it to a bowl, add enough olive oil to completely cover the surface and set it aside.

Peel the tomatoes and remove the seeds. Pass them through a vegetable mill or purée them and season them with salt and pepper to taste.

Heat part of the tomato purée in a pan. Soak the gelatin in cold water, then add it to the heated tomato and let it dissolve. Add the rest of the tomato purée and pour it into glasses. Refrigerate them for at least 2 hours.

Once the tomato jelly has set, place a spoonful of burrata in each glass. Garnish each one with pesto and serve them well chilled.



BRUSCHETTA CON OLIO EXTRAVERGINE, POMODORO E BASILICO

TOMATO-BASIL BRUSCHETTA WITH EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 20' (preparation: 20 minutes)

0.88 lbs (400 g) baguette
0.66 lbs (300 g) San Marzano tomatoes (about 1 1/2 large)
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
4 basil leaves
1 garlic clove
Salt to taste

Method

Slice the bread into pieces about 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm) thick and toast them in the oven or in a pan on the stove.

Once they're toasted, peel the garlic and lightly rub it over the bread.

Dice the tomato and season it with oil, salt and roughly chopped basil. Let it sit for a few minutes to absorb the flavors.

If the bread slices are too big, cut them into smaller pieces. Spread some diced tomatoes on top of each one and serve.

RUSTIC BREAD

In the past, many people made their bread at home using coarsely ground whole grain flours and natural yeast made through a long and precise treatment applied to already leavened bread. The bacteria responsible for this leavening gave the bread an unmistakable aroma. And the higher acidity of starters, compared to modern yeast, made the bread more resistant to further contamination by bacteria and therefore made it more "preservable," which is why bread once lasted much longer. This would be enough to explain why loaves of rustic country bread could be so incredibly large, but there are other factors that played into the size and shape of bread. First there were socio-economic factors. If farming families had their own oven, or there was one easily accessible to the collective, the bread was smaller. On the contrary, when the powerful were in charge of the ovens, the loaves tended to be bigger, in a way making the family more autonomous with respect to the local lords.



CALAMARI FARCITI
STUFFED CALAMARI

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 45' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

4 medium squid
4 shrimp
1/3 cup (40 g) breadcrumbs
1 lemon (zest and juice)
1 egg white
Half a garlic clove
1 tbsp minced parsley
3.5 oz (100 g) mixed greens
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean and rinse the squid and shrimp.

Cut the tentacles off the squid and boil them in water with the lemon juice. Roughly chop the tentacles and finely chop the shrimp.

Mince the garlic and parsley and combine them with the breadcrumbs. Mix in the egg white, tentacles, shrimp, a pinch of lemon zest and salt and pepper to taste.

Stuff the squid with this filling, using toothpicks to hold them closed.

Lightly grease a pan with olive oil and arrange the squid inside. Bake them in a preheated oven at 340-350° F (170-180° C) for about 15 minutes.

Slice the squid and garnish each serving with mixed greens. Top it off with a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil.

SALAD GREENS

In A Brief Account of the Fruits, Herbs and Vegetables of Italy, *Giacomo Castelvetro (originally from Modena, though Venice was his adopted home) highlights the importance of salads in Italian gastronomy. Unlike other European culinary traditions, Italian cuisine is largely characterized by the use of vegetables, root vegetables, herbs (wild and cultivated) and agricultural products in general. According to Castelvetro, this Italian custom has its roots in specific social, economic and climactic conditions, but it quickly became a genuine preference. Castelvetro even explains the "salad law" that should be followed when dressing salads in order to fully honor the palate. First, the greens must be carefully washed and dried, then arranged on a plate that has already been sprinkled with a bit of salt. Then salt should be sprinkled over the greens and a good amount of olive oil should be drizzled on top. It needs to be carefully tossed so that each leaf "gets some oil." Finish with a generous dash of vinegar. If you don't follow this procedure, the delicious salad greens remain, as the author stresses, only "good for duck food."*



CAPPON MAGRO

SEAFOOD AND VEGETABLE SALAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 2 h (preparation: 2 hours)

4 hard tack biscuits (or 4 thick slices of bread, toasted)
1.76 lbs (800 g) sea bass or ombrina
1 lobster, about 1.65 lbs (750 g)
4 scampi
0.88 oz (25 g) sun-dried salted fish strips or cured fish roe
2 anchovies packed in salt
2 boiled eggs
0.66 lbs (300 g) cauliflower
3.5 oz (100 g) green beans (about 18)
3.5 oz (100 g) potatoes (about 1 small)
3.5 oz (100 g) carrots (about 2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) celery (about 3 small stalks)
7 oz (200 g) beets (about 2 1/2)
7 oz (200 g) turnips (about 3 small)
2.1 oz (60 g) mushrooms marinated in oil
2 artichokes
12 green olives
1 lemon
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) wine vinegar
1 garlic clove

SAUCE
0.3 oz (8 g) parsley (about 2 tbsp)
0.7 oz (20 g) fresh breadcrumbs (about 1/2 cup)
1 tbsp (15 ml) vinegar
0.53 oz (15 g) pine nuts (about 2 tbsp)
0.53 oz (15 g) anchovies packed in salt
0.53 oz (15 g) capers (about 2 tbsp)
1 tbsp (15 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
0.35 oz (10 g) green olives, pitted (about 2-3 large)
1 garlic clove
2 yolks from boiled eggs
Salt to taste

Method

Start the sauce by soaking the breadcrumbs in the vinegar until they soften. Squeeze out any excess liquid and transfer them to a food processor. Add the anchovies (rinse them well and remove the bones), the garlic clove, 2 boiled egg yolks, capers, olives, pine nuts, parsley and a drizzle of olive oil. Blend well and season with salt to taste.

Boil the cauliflower, green beans, celery and carrots in salted water. In a separate pot, boil the potatoes, turnips, beets and artichokes (cleaned and halved). Dice or slice the vegetables and season them with salt, a dash of vinegar and half the oil.

Clean the bass and boil it in salted water. Separately boil the lobster (about 20 minutes) and the scampi (about 5 minutes). Shell the lobster and scampi and slice them. Chop up the bass as well. Season the seafood with the lemon juice, a pinch of salt and the remaining oil.

Arrange alternating layers of vegetables and fish on each plate, spreading the sauce between them.

Finish with the lobster rounds, scampi, 1 anchovy per serving, the sliced fish strips (or cured fish roe), boiled egg slices, olives and marinated mushrooms. Drizzle the remaining sauce on top. Sprinkle the toast or biscuits with a bit of vinegar and serve them on the side or underneath the salad.



GUAZZETTO DI FAGIOLI CANNELLINI AL GUANCIALE
CANNELLINI BEANS AND GUANCIALE STEWED IN TOMATO SAUCE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 55' + 12 h for beans to soak
(preparation: 15 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

7 oz (200 g) cannellini beans (about 1 cup)
7 oz (200 g) tomatoes (2 small)
2 tbsp (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
3.5 oz (100 g) *guanciale* (cured pig's cheek), thickly sliced
1 garlic clove
1 tbsp minced parsley
1 sprig of thyme
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Soak the beans in cold water for 12 hours. Strain them and boil them in unsalted water for 15-20 minutes.

Peel the tomatoes, remove the seeds and dice the tomatoes.

Heat the oil in a pan. Add the minced garlic, parsley, a whole thyme sprig and half the guanciale (cut into strips). Then add the diced tomatoes and the boiled beans, as soon as they're done and strained. Season with salt and pepper and let everything cook on low heat for a few more minutes.

Bake the remaining *guanciale* (cut into strips) in a hot oven until it's crispy.

Serve the stewed beans with crispy *guanciale* and freshly ground black pepper.

BEANS IN ITALY

Before other species arrived from America, the only beans known in Europe were of the dolichos variety, called fagioli dall'occhio *(eye beans) in Italian for the small black spot where the seed is attached to the pod. The "poor man's meat," as legumes were once known, always played a fundamental role on the tables of the lower classes. In fact, it's worth noting that unlike other products from the Americas, beans spread quite rapidly throughout Europe. People were already used to eating them (mainly in soups, mixed with grains) and it wasn't difficult to integrate them into the existing gastronomic and agricultural systems.*



INSALATA DI CONIGLIO

RABBIT SALAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' + 2 h to marinate
(preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

Half a rabbit
3.5 oz (100 g) cherry tomatoes (about 6)
0.44 lbs (200 g) mache
2 bunches of sage
1 sprig of rosemary
1 sprig of marjoram
1 garlic clove
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Boil the rabbit with half the sage in salted water for 20 minutes. When it's done, remove the bones and break the rabbit meat up into small pieces by hand.

Mix the meat with a whole garlic clove (if you prefer, you can use the garlic to infuse the olive oil before adding it), freshly ground pepper, a pinch of salt and 4/5 of the oil. Let it marinate in the refrigerator for 2 hours.

Arrange a bed of mache (thoroughly rinsed and dried) on a plate and place the rabbit on top. Cut the tomatoes into wedges and add them. Mince the sage, rosemary, marjoram and parsley together and add them as well. Finish with a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil and serve.

RABBIT

Italian rabbit is particularly high in quality and production is divided among small rural farms and large zootechnical companies that are highly controlled. Rabbit is a white meat, tender, lean, easily digested, safe and very low in cholesterol. Though today it's chosen for its nutritional value – the rabbit farming industry is the fourth largest in Italy – rabbit meat has always been popular. Medieval dietary beliefs, which attributed precise properties and influences on the mind and body to all food items, held that rabbit was bad for the melancholy and the elderly but good for the young and energetic. According to the ancients, the name coniglio *(rabbit) came from the animal's habit of living in underground* cunicoli *(tunnels). All domesticated breeds originated as wild rabbits that lived in underground burrows. It seems that these extraordinarily prolific animals were too much for even the emperor Augustus. Residents of the Balearic Islands were reduced to famine because of the abnormally prolific multiplication of rabbits and requested the assistance of military troops to eliminate the infestation.*



INSALATA DI SGOMBRO
MACKEREL SALAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 1 hour)

4 fresh mackerel, about 0.55 lbs (250 g) each
0.44 lbs (200 g) mixed greens
1.76 oz (50 g) golden raisins (about 1/3 cups)
1.76 oz (50 g) toasted pine nuts (about 1/4 cup + 2 tbsp)
1.76 oz (50 g) green olives (about 18)
A few chive leaves
A few mint leaves
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp (10 ml) Modena balsamic vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste

COURT-BOUILLON
8 1/2 cups (2 L) water
1 cup (250 ml) vinegar
2.8 oz (80 g) carrots (about 1 1/2 small)
5.3 oz (150 g) onions (about 2 small)
2.5 oz (70 g) celery (about 2 medium stalks)
5 black peppercorns
1 bay leaf

Method

Make the *court-bouillon* first, putting all the ingredients in the water and letting it boil for 30 minutes. Soak the raisins in warm water for at least 15 minutes.

Clean and gut the mackerel, rinsing them well under cold water.

Rinse the greens and chop up the olives.

Boil the mackerel in the *court-bouillon* for 10-12 minutes (cooking time will depend on the size of the fish), then let them cool. Fillet them and remove the bones, then divide each fillet into 4 pieces.

Roughly chop the chives and mint and add them to the greens. Dress the mixture with balsamic vinegar, salt and oil. Mix well and distribute it among serving plates, adding the olives, raisins and pine nuts. Add the mackerel fillets last. Drizzle olive oil on top and sprinkle with freshly ground pepper.

EASTERN FISH, WESTERN FISH

The ancients were well aware of the rich biodiversity of the Mediterranean Sea and the variety it offered to the fishing industry, and they knew where to find the best fish. For example, mackerel usually comes closer to the shore in the spring, after reproducing. It's in the "blue fish" category and is popular throughout the Mediterranean, though the Adriatic kind has always been particularly appreciated for its delicate flavor. Attention to age and origin is important in the underwater realms, too.



INSALATINA DI FINOCCHIO CON CARPACCIO DI SPADA MARINATO AL FINOCCHIETTO

FENNEL SALAD WITH SWORDFISH CARPACCIO IN WILD FENNEL MARINADE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 50 minutes)

0.77 lbs (350 g) fennel (about 1 1/2 bulbs)
0.88 lbs (400 g) swordfish
2 lemons
0.7 oz (20 g) wild fennel (about 1/4 cup)
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Skin the swordfish and slice it as thinly as possible with a very sharp knife. Arrange the slices in a steel tray and season them with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle them with wild fennel and drizzle lemon juice on top. Let them marinate for about 30 minutes in the refrigerator.

Wash the fennel, slice it very thinly and put it in ice water.

Make a lemon dressing by whisking together 3 tablespoons (40 ml) of olive oil, the juice of half a lemon and salt and pepper to taste.

Strain and dry the fennel. Combine it with the lemon dressing and place it in the center of the plate. Arrange the swordfish slices around it (be sure to strain them well when removing them from the marinade). Drizzle cold-pressed olive oil on top and garnish with fresh wild fennel and strips of lemon peel.

THE SYMBOLISM OF RAW FISH

In Western culture, cooking something means altering food's natural properties. Humans have codified strict rules about the supply and consumption of food and have the systems and technology (agriculture, breeding, harvesting) to manage their nutritional needs. But we can alter food products further by transforming them and changing their states – in other words, by cooking them. Humans are able to distinguish themselves from animals by specific parameters and categories that are linked to the alimentary sphere. Eating raw meat, therefore, signifies crossing certain boundaries and entering the shadowy, uncivilized animal territory of raw hunger and feral hunting instincts. According to anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, the passage from "raw" to "cooked" represents a critical moment in the development of civilization, as it implies a voluntary separation from nature. The consumption of raw fish has become very popular in Italy over the last few years, for general nutritional reasons and because of growing interest in Japanese cuisine. But a closer look reveals that it's really a return to old traditions. Sea urchins, mussels, anchovies, oysters and octopus under 1 lb (450 g) have long been served raw in Puglia and Sicily. In short, a global trend has led a tradition that was once limited to local areas to spread throughout the country.



INSALATINA TIEPIDA DI FARRO CON GAMBERI
WARM SPELT SALAD WITH SHRIMP

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (150 g) spelt
12 shrimp
3.5 oz (100 g) carrots (about 2 small)
3.5 oz (100 g) zucchini (about 1 small)
3.5 oz (100 g) tomato (about 1/2 large)
1.76 oz (50 g) peas (about 1/3 cup)
1.76 oz (50 g) red onion (about 3/4 small)
1 tsp minced parsley
A few basil leaves
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

Method

Finely chop the onion and sauté it in a bit of oil. Add the zucchini and carrots (both diced) and season with salt and pepper. Let them cook, but don't let them soften. Add the blanched peas.

Peel the tomato, remove the seeds and dice it.

Boil the spelt in salted water, strain it and put it in a bowl. Add the cooked vegetables, diced tomatoes and hand-torn basil. Season with cold-pressed olive oil and salt to taste.

Sauté the shrimp in a bit of oil and serve them with the spelt salad.

FARRO

Triticum dicoccum *is a grain known as farro, which has been widely cultivated since antiquity and played a fundamental role in the alimentary history of classical civilization. In fact, the Romans actually made* puls *(which can be translated as "polenta") from farro.* Puls *became a bona fide "national dish" for quite some time, especially during the austere and frugal period of the Roman Republic. It was eaten daily by the legionaries and the general population, and it was a staple food for the slaves. It was so widely used that the Italian term* farina *(flour) derived from the very grain that was used to make it. Farro was even at the center of an ancient Roman marriage ceremony called* confarreatio *(literally "the sharing of farro"). The bride and groom would eat a piece of farro cake (no point in lingering over the symbolic meaning of this) in the presence of the supreme pontiff and ten citizens who served as witnesses. The playwright Plautus (3rd-2nd century BC) made reference to the Greeks' habit of taunting the Romans by calling them* pultiphagi *(southern Italians still jokingly refer to their fellow citizens from the north as* polentoni, *which literally means "big polentas"), almost as if asserting their cultural superiority, even in a culinary context. Farro has now become something of a niche grain, but it has surely left an indelible mark on Italian cooking and eating habits.*



INVOLTINI DI MELANZANE AL CAPRINO CON ERBA CIPOLLINA, CIPOLLA IN AGRODOLCE E SALSA DI POMODORO CRUDA

EGGPLANT STUFFED WITH GOAT CHEESE, SWEET AND SOUR ONION AND TOMATO SALSA

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 45' (preparation: 45 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) eggplant (about 2)
0.77 lbs (350 g) Tropea onions (about 5 small)
0.88 lbs (400 g) tomatoes (about 2 large)
0.66 lbs (300 g) Caprino cheese
1 cup (250 ml) white vinegar
2 1/2 tbsp (30 g) sugar
1 bunch of chives
6 large basil leaves
2/3 cup (150 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Rinse the eggplant and slice them lengthwise. Sprinkle the slices generously with salt and let them drain.

After about 20 minutes, sauté them with a bit of oil in a nonstick pan over medium heat. When they're done, lay them on paper towels to absorb the excess oil.

Mix the Caprino with the chives and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Wash the tomatoes and purée them with about 2 tbsp (30 ml) of olive oil. Strain the purée with a fine mesh strainer and season with salt and pepper.

Slice the onions and heat them in a pan with the sugar and vinegar. When the liquid reaches a boil, turn off the heat and strain it.

Blend the basil leaves, already washed and dried, with 2 tbsp (30 ml) of olive oil.

Place a tablespoon of cheese in the middle of each eggplant slice and roll it up.
Tie chive leaves around it so it stays closed. Arrange them on serving plates with a spoonful of sweet and sour onions, a spoonful of tomato sauce and a drizzle of basil oil.



MILLEFOGLIE DI CANNOCCHIE, POMODORI CONFIT E OLIO AL BASILICO

MANTIS PRAWNS WITH TOMATO CONFIT AND BASIL OIL

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 36' (preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + cooking: 6 minutes)

16 mantis prawns
1 oz (30 g) basil (about 1 1/4 cup whole leaves)
3.5 oz (100 g) mixed greens
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

TOMATO CONFIT
2.6 lbs (1.2 kg) ripe tomatoes (about 6 1/2 large)
1 garlic clove
0.35 oz (10 g) thyme (about 1/4 cup)
2 tsp (10 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt, pepper and sugar to taste

Method

Shell the prawns, using scissors to cut down the back. Season them with salt, pepper and some of the oil and leave them to marinate.

Wash and peel the tomatoes. Blanch them for 30 seconds and transfer them immediately to ice water. Cut them into quarters, remove the seeds and lay them in a pan lined with parchment paper. Season them on both sides with thyme, thinly sliced garlic and a pinch of salt, pepper and sugar. Bake them at 175° F (80° C) for 1 hour.

Line another pan with parchment paper and arrange square cooking molds inside. Fill them with alternating layers of tomatoes and prawns. Finish with a layer of tomatoes.

Bake them in a preheated oven at 300° F (150° C) for 6 minutes. Blanch the basil leaves in a small amount of water for a couple of minutes. Strain them and put them directly in ice water. Use an immersion blender to blend them with the remaining oil.

Remove the molds from the oven and serve the shrimp and tomatoes with the basil oil.



MOZZARELLA ALLA CAPRESE FRITTA

FRIED MOZZARELLA CAPRESE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30' (preparation: 25 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

0.55 lbs (250 g) mozzarella
2 1/3 cups (250 g) breadcrumbs
0.77 lbs (350 g) vine-ripened tomatoes (about 2 large)
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (50 g) flour
3 eggs
4 basil leaves
Salt to taste
Olive oil for frying

Method

Slice the mozzarella and tomatoes into pieces of equal thickness.

Stack four alternating layers of tomato and mozzarella, sliding basil leaves in between them.

Wrap each stack in parchment paper to absorb excess liquid. Then dredge each one in the flour, dip it in the egg and coat it with breadcrumbs. Dip it in the egg and coat it in breadcrumbs again.

Fry them in boiling oil and place them on paper towels to dry. Sprinkle them with salt and serve.

MILK AND CHEESE

Milk is the primordial nutrient, maternal nourishment, pure white liquid par excellence. Not only is it a valuable food product in its natural state, it also lends itself to numerous modifications because of its capacity to take on a semi-solid or solid form through fermentation and curdling. Italians learned to manage the physical and biological transformation of milk, controlling and manipulating these changes with skill and originating an incredibly wide range of extraordinary cheeses: hard or soft, fresh or aged, blue, cow's milk, sheep's milk or goat's milk – the list of Italian cheese products is almost infinite. They can be considered fruits of the agro-pastoral Mediterranean cultures, but this didn't cause the wealthy and powerful to love them any less. Irrefutable evidence is provided by Pantaleone da Confienza's 15th century treatise, Summa Lacticinorum, *which was dedicated to these delicacies*



PEPERONI RIPIENI DI CODA DI ROSPO

PEPPERS STUFFED WITH ANGLERFISH

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 5' (preparation: 50 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

2 red bell peppers
0.66 lbs (300 g) anglerfish
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Wash the peppers and roast them in a preheated oven at 375° F (190° C) for 20 minutes, making sure they stay fairly crunchy. Peel them and remove the seeds, then cut them into large strips.

Clean the anglerfish, remove the bones and slice the fish lengthwise to get 2 long fillets just over 1 inch (3 cm) wide. Season them with salt and pepper. Lay them over the pepper slices and roll them up. Wrap each one in a piece of aluminum foil and bake them in a preheated oven at 300° F (150° C) for about 15 minutes with no condiments.

Let them cool completely, then slice them into rounds and serve them with any garnish you prefer.

PEPPERS

Peppers entered the Italian gastronomic system in the 16th century, along with other products from the Americas. The name of this vegetable probably refers to the distinctive spicy taste. Whether it was because of the particular flavor or the bright color, peppers were initially looked upon with mistrust, like many other plants that were unknown until that point. But contrary to many others, it was unexpectedly adopted by the masses (perhaps pushed by more urgent nutritional needs) before making its way to the tables of the aristocracy. There is some evidence that supports this theory. For example, the fact that Vincenzo Corrado defines the pepper as a "rustic and vulgar food" in his late 18th century treatise, The Gallant Cook, *leads one to believe that its place among the common people was already established while it was not well liked among the upper classes. The early tradition of pickling of peppers in vinegar (according to typical rural preservation methods) also points to the conclusion that the lower classes were the first to comprehend the taste and nutritional value of this succulent fruit of the earth.*



PIZZETTE DI MELANZANE CON SCAMORZA AFFUMICATA E POMODORO

EGGPLANT PIZZAS WITH TOMATOES AND SMOKED SCAMORZA

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

0.88 lbs (400 g) medium round eggplant (about 3/4 medium)
2 eggs
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) milk
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (50 g) flour
Olive oil for frying
1/3 cups (30 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
1 bunch of fresh basil
12.3 oz (350 g) crushed tomatoes
0.33 lbs (150 g) smoked scamorza
Salt and white pepper to taste

Method

Wash and dry the eggplant. Slice it crosswise into pieces about 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm) thick.

Beat the egg with the milk and a pinch of salt and pepper.

Lightly flour the eggplant slices and shake off the excess. Dip them in the egg, being careful not to make the coating too thick.

Pour the oil into a large skillet over medium heat. Fry the eggplant slices a few at a time. When they've turned golden brown on both sides, place them on paper towels.

Cut the scamorza into 1/8-1/4 inch (0.5 cm) cubes.

Arrange the eggplant in a pan lined with parchment paper. Place 2 small spoonfuls of crushed tomatoes on each slice, followed by a pinch of salt and pepper, a basil leaf, a few scamorza cubes and a sprinkling of Parmigiano.

Preheat the oven to 350° F (180° C), bake the pizzas for 10 minutes and serve.

SCAMORZA

This typical southern Italian cheese has a recognizable pear shape and shares its origins (along with some production methods) with other cheese products of the area, like mozzarella and Caciocavallo. Small details during the preparation and aging process make each of them slightly different. For scamorza, milk is heated slightly and then hot water is added until the necessary thready texture is achieved. There is also a smoked version of this cheese, which can be eaten either raw or cooked as an ingredient in other recipes. It's left to mature for 5 to 6 days before it's consumed. But the basic ingredients are the same as those used for an incredible array of southern Italian cheeses. It follows that the farm culture, showing a great creative capacity and admirable skill in manipulating edible items, was able to take a few simple, everyday ingredients (milk, water, salt and little else) and transform them into a piece of gastronomic heritage that is coveted worldwide.



SCAMPI GRATINATI AI PISTACCHI

BAKED SCAMPI WITH PISTACHIOS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 33' (preparation: 25 minutes + cooking: 8 minutes)

12 scampi
3.5 oz (100 g) shelled pistachios (about 3/4 cup)
1/3 cup + 2 tbsp (50 g) breadcrumbs
2 tbsp (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Shell the scampi but leave the heads attached. Season them with salt and pepper.

Finely chop the pistachios and mix them with the breadcrumbs. Add 2 tablespoons of oil and a pinch of salt.

Grease a baking pan with a bit of oil and arrange the scampi inside it. Cover them with the pistachio and breadcrumb mixture. Bake them in a preheated oven at 350° F (180° C) for about 8 minutes.

CRUSTACEANS IN ANTIQUITY

In ancient Rome, especially during the Imperial Age, fish and shellfish were very popular. Gastronomically speaking, they were prepared in widely differing ways. Shrimp and locust lobster were made into delicious "fish balls" by removing the shells and crushing the flesh in a mortar with black pepper and garum *(Roman fermented fish sauce). But Romans usually sliced the fish in half and cooked them on the grill, proving that simplicity never goes out of style.*



SFOGLIATINE ALL'OLIO EXTRAVERGINE, CON RICOTTA MANTECATA ALL'ORIGANO E PESTO DI OLIVE NERE

PUFF PASTRY WITH CREAMY OREGANO-FLAVORED RICOTTA AND OLIVE PESTO

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 43' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 12-13 minutes)

PASTA
1 3/4 cups + 1 1/2 tbsp (250 g) Italian "00" flour
1/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 cup (120 ml) water
3/4 tsp (5 g) salt

FILLING
0.35 lbs (160 g) fresh goat's ricotta
0.5 oz (15 g) fresh oregano (about 2 tbsp + 2 tsp)
2.8 oz (80 g) black olive pesto
1 tbsp + 2 tsp (25 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

GARNISH
Mixed greens to taste
2 tbsp (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Mix the flour with the oil, water and a pinch of salt until a smooth and homogenous dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Use a rolling pin or pasta machine to roll out sheets about 1/16 inch (2 mm) thick. Use a fluted pastry wheel to cut out 3-inch (8 cm) squares. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and bake the dough in a preheated oven at 350° F (180° C) for about 12 minutes.

Whisk the ricotta with the oil, oregano and olive pesto. Use a pastry bag to place a bit of filling on a square of dough. Place another square on top, like a sandwich.

Garnish with mixed greens and a dash of cold-pressed olive oil.



SFORMATO DI PANE CASERECCIO, FUNGHI E CACIOCAVALLO CON POMODORINI FRESCHI

SAVORY BREAD PUDDING WITH MUSHROOMS, CACIOCAVALLO CHEESE AND FRESH CHERRY TOMATOES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

0.22 lbs (100 g) bread, baked in a wood fired oven (about 3 cups cubed)
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
0.7 oz (20 g) shallots (about 2 tbsp chopped)
2.1 oz (60 g) Caciocavallo cheese
0.22 lbs (100 g) wild mushrooms
0.7 oz (20 g) minced parsley (about 5 tbsp)
1/2 cup (125 ml) milk
1 egg
1/3 cup (30 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
Salt and pepper to taste

GARNISH
0.44 lbs (200 g) cherry tomatoes (about 12)
1 tbsp minced parsley
1 tbsp (15 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Finely chop the scallion and stew it in the oil. Then add the mushrooms and the minced parsley. Lightly salt the vegetables and let them cook for a few minutes. Add the bread (cubed, with crust removed) and diced cheese. Grease individual ramekins and fill them with the mixture.

Beat the egg with the milk and grated Parmigiano. Season it with salt and pepper and pour it over the bread mixture. Bake it at 325° F (160° C) for about 20 minutes.

Rinse the tomatoes and slice them. Sauté them in the oil and season them with salt to taste. Top the bread pudding with tomatoes and minced parsley.

CACIOCAVALLO

In the realm of gastronomy, some of the greatest products are often given curious names of mysterious origin. Such is the case for Caciocavallo – a semi-hard cheese shaped like a pear or flask, perhaps one of the oldest "stretchy" cheeses – which has been produced since at least the Middle Ages. According to some, the name comes from the tradition of tying two cheeses together and hanging them over a pole or beam to let them age, resulting in the expression cacio-a-cavallo, *meaning "cheese on horseback." Others believe it comes from the herders' habit of tying pairs of cheeses to the horse's saddles when they came down from the mountain pastures. But the most likely explanation is perhaps the least bizarre: The name is from a stamp or seal depicting a horse which was placed on the cheese under the Kingdom of Naples. Whatever the story may be, this cheese has proven to be an Italian favorite for centuries.*



TERRINA DI CAPESANTE E GAMBERI

SHRIMP AND SCALLOP CASSEROLE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 30' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 30 minutes)

0.66 lbs (300 g) scallops
0.22 lbs (100 g) shrimp, cleaned and shelled
1 egg white
1/4 cup (60 ml) heavy cream
1 lemon
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
4 leaves of Savoy cabbage
1.4 oz (40 g) carrots (about 3/4 small)
1.4 oz (40 g) bell pepper (about 1/2 small)
1.4 oz (40 g) zucchini (about 1/2 small)

Method

Rinse the scallops and marinate them in a bit of oil with salt and pepper.

Blend 6 of the shrimp (leave the rest whole) with the egg white and cream, making sure the ingredients are very cold. Season it with salt and pepper.

Boil the cabbage leaves in salted water. Strain them, let them cool, dry them on a towel and use them to line a greased pan.

Cut the other vegetables into small strips and boil them in salted water. Strain them and let them cool.

Strain the scallops and add them to the shrimp mousse along with the vegetables. Pour into the pan and fold the cabbage leaves over to cover the top.

Put the casserole in a water bath and bake it in a preheated oven at 300° F (150° C) for 30 minutes. Let it cool, then slice and serve it.

CABBAGE

The Liber de Coquina *is the oldest Italian cookbook, dating to the early 4th century or possibly even the late 3rd century. It begins by listing various recipes for cabbage, that humble vegetable par excellence, further confirming just how well loved it was in kitchens of the past. As if that's not enough, the Liber was actually edited by an anonymous cook with an upper class education from the Angevin Court of Naples. This is a very common phenomenon in Italian culinary history – products that seemed destined for the tables of the have-nots were combined with something expensive (truffles or costly spices, for example) and shifted to the tables of the wealthy. But this style of gastronomy, which distinguishes Italian cuisine from other European cuisines, is also a sign of an appreciation for the extraordinary fruits of the earth that transcends class – it's shared by the rich and the poor, by the nobles and the common people.*



TIMBALLINO DI SCAROLA CON SALSA DI PORRI AL LATTE

BAKED ENDIVE WITH CREAMY LEEK SAUCE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

0.77 lbs (350 g) endive (+ 8 leaves to line the ramekins)
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup (50 g) fresh breadcrumbs
1 garlic clove
0.7 oz (20 g) anchovies packed in salt
1/3 cup (30 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Wash the endive and boil it in salted water for a few minutes. Strain it and put it in ice water to cool.

Rinse the anchovies and cook them with the garlic and oil until they dissolve. Squeeze the endive dry and add it to the anchovies. Season with salt and pepper and let everything cook for a few minutes to bring the flavors together. Remove the pan from the heat and mix in the breadcrumbs and Pamigiano.

Blanch the 8 leaves you set aside and use them to line well-greased ramekins. Fill them with the endive-anchovy mixture and fold the leaves over the top. Bake them in a water bath at 325° F (160° C) for 15 minutes.

Wash the white part of the leeks and cut it into thin strips. Put it in a pot with the milk and let it cook over low heat for about 15 minutes. Season it with salt and pepper to taste.

Remove the baked endive from the ramekins and serve it with the leek sauce. If you like, you can garnish it with fried leeks.

THE CULTURE OF LEFTOVERS

In a subsistence economy like that which was predominant in Italy until the mid-20th century, it's essential to know how to use all produce and prepared food to the fullest extent. In farming culture, bread (nourishment par excellence) is manipulated, altered and treated in a number of different ways to make it last longer. Every region of Italy has traditional recipes for reusing stale bread. Broken up into breadcrumbs, sliced, soaked in liquids, seasoned and enriched in an incredible variety of ways, it can be the center of the meal or an indispensable side dish. The dark, hard bread of the humble masses has been skillfully transformed into a true delicacy. Utilizing every edible item may have been a necessity, but the Italian people deserve the credit for making it a treat.



TORTA DI PASQUA AL FORMAGGIO

EASTER CHEESE BREAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 2 h 10' (preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

2 2/3 cups (325 g) flour
1 cup + 3 tbsp (120 g) Pecorino cheese, grated (3 tbsp/20 g to sprinkle on top)
1.76 oz (50 g) Pecorino cheese, diced (about 1/2 cup)
6 tbsp (90 g) butter (1 tbsp/15 g to grease the pan)
0.88 oz (25 g) brewer's yeast
1 1/2 tsp (7 g) baking powder
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) water
4 eggs (1 for the egg wash)
1/3 cup + 2 1/2 tbsp (50 g) breadcrumbs
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Beat 3 eggs with the cheese and a pinch of salt and pepper. Add 5 1/2 tablespoons (75 g) of melted butter and the yeast (dissolved in warm water). Mix in the flour and baking powder.

Grease four ramekins (the same size you would use for crème brûlée) and line them with breadcrumbs. Fill them halfway with dough.

Let the dough rise until it doubles in size and brush the top of each one with a beaten egg. Sprinkle them with freshly ground pepper and 3 tbsp of grated Pecorino. Bake them in a preheated oven at 350° F (180° C) for about 40 minutes.

RITUAL FOODS

The millennial culture of food has always been closely tied to the agricultural calendar and religious liturgy. In the Italian Catholic tradition, Easter is definitely the most important holiday of the year. Anthropologically speaking, rituality entered the domestic environment mainly through food. Eating habits punctuate the rhythms of the year and of life, and at the same time transmit archetypical symbols to the community, which subconsciously assimilates them through the preparation, cooking, and consumption of holiday feasts. Eggs are clearly the predominant symbol and food item for Easter celebrations. Whether it's the protagonist, or simply one of many ingredients, its presence in recipes for that religious occasion is a foregone conclusion. A universal sign of genesis and rebirth – perhaps because it's considered the equivalent of a primordial seed that's complete in and of itself – the egg conveys a sense of both fully formed life and potential life. Over time the value of the egg has changed, but it hasn't lost the centrality it's always enjoyed as a symbol of Easter. Today it represents prosperity, joy, and renewal in general, beyond any religious affiliations.



FIRST COURSES



How can we define the *primo piatto*? How can we convey the concept of this Italian first course to someone who isn't Italian? How can we explain what's included and what isn't? Upon reflection, these things are much more complicated than they seem. Soups are generally included, but fish-based soups are left out because they're generally classified as a one-course meal or an entrée. Restaurants these days tend to categorize polenta dishes, where the basic ingredients are grains and water, as entrées, sides, or appetizers. And yet, any Italian would immediately be able to tell you which category a dish falls under. In fact, the structure of the ideal meal – the network of rules and invisible ties that gives a sense of order to the act of eating – is something instinctive (the same is true for the ideal of any other dietary habit). You could say that it's absorbed like a mother tongue, acquired through experience and practice, providing a sense of individual and collective belonging and identity.

Perhaps we've never thought about it, but every population, every culture, and every historical era had its own particular eating habits. We're not just referring to the act of choosing food from the wide array of edible items that was available, we mean the actual customs and practices surrounding the consumption of food. Do people eat while squatting on the floor, sitting on chairs or benches, lying down, or standing up? Do they eat in a hurry or take their time? Do they serve themselves from a communal platter and eat with their hands or eat from an individual plate with silverware? Does the "model" meal call for eating in the company of others or eating alone? Does the meal proceed with a series of hierarchically organized courses or do we choose whatever catches our eye from several offerings? The responses to each of these questions can provide food for thought, not just in terms of gastronomic history, but in the larger sense of our lifestyle and existence. And perhaps more usefully, in terms of what's changed and what's been lost in the last few decades.

Following this train of thought, we realize that as far as the ideal meal is concerned, Italy is quite unique. Unlike most of the world (or perhaps the entire rest of the world), Italy has two main categories whose nutritional natures are diametrically opposed. They are equal and complementary, and compared to them everything else fades into the background. Almost as if the planets in our solar system revolved around two suns, or a monarchy was ruled by two kings at once. The definition of *primo piatto* (first course) and *secondo piatto* (second course) refers to the chronological order in which they're served, and not, as it may seem, to a hierarchical classification.

For example, in the Anglo-Saxon culture, there is one main course and the entire meal is organized around it. To what do we owe the anomaly of the Italian gastronomic system?

The fact that two markedly different culinary protagonists – the *primo* and the *secondo* – share



the table makes the Italian meal instantly recognizable and entirely unique. But what is the historical reason for this curious structure? To find the answer, we need to return to the past. We can assume that the character of Italian gastronomy derives from the fact that it embraced two separate culinary traditions (from classical culture and Germanic/Celtic culture) and adopted them. Over centuries they became integrated, fusing and permeating each other, with neither one backing down. The Greco-Roman culture (strengthened by the advent of Christianity) was built around the grain-olive-grape triad, so its culinary habits were strongly based on plant products (grains, legumes, vegetables, olive oil), which were enhanced with small quantities of fat and protein (cheese, and meat that was predominantly ovine, poultry, or rabbit). The Celtic and Germanic populations had already come into contact and combat with the Roman Empire in the 3rd century AD. They overtook and replaced the ancient ruling class of Latin origin and brought a completely different culinary tradition with them. They preferred uncultivated land and knew how to use it to its fullest extent (wild game, undergrowth, roots, and berries), breeding wild animals (especially pigs) in the forests. They considered red meat the center of every meal and it's no coincidence that for the warlike Germanic tribes, meat consumption symbolized fertility, power, strength, and a warrior's furor. Though they weren't familiar with wine, they drank large quantities of milk and its acidic derivatives, along with *cerevisia* (a forerunner of beer), and they used butter and lard for cooking and greasing.

In conclusion, it seems as if these two culinary cultures, which met and influenced each other for centuries, came to a sort of reconciliation at the Italian table, an equilibrium that is still manifested today in the coexistence of two indomitable courses. The *primo piatto* is the final product of the intermingling Mediterranean, Roman, and Christian cultures (with important influences from the Arab world). At the same time, it's an expression of popular traditions born of poverty and based on utilizing natural products. On the contrary, the *secondo piatto* represents the Germanic and Celtic aspect, which was more concerned with the consumption of meat and fish, and which tended to be reserved for the upper classes.

Today the *primo piatto* has been retooled, and in some everyday contexts it's considered a one-course meal. Its versatility can be considered emblematic of the complex gastronomic history of the Italian peninsula, as the category includes soups, stews, baked pasta, fresh pasta in sauce or broth, dried pasta prepared in a number of ways, fresh semolina pasta, stuffed pasta, a series of non-pasta pastas like gnocchi, *canederli*, and *passatelli*, and other infinite variations on this theme. In short, the *primo piatto* lends itself to a rich variety of interpretations, which parallel the richness of Italian culinary heritage and represent the country's truly distinct culinary identity.



ANELLI GIGANTI CON PESCE SPADA, PUNTARELLE E BOTTARGA DI TONNO

ANELLI GIGANTI PASTA WITH SWORDFISH, CHICORY AND CURED FISH ROE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

12.3 oz (350 g) anelli giganti pasta
1 fresh swordfish steak, about 0.5 lbs (240 g)
0.88 lbs (400 g) chicory
2.8 oz (80 g) cured tuna roe
6-7 chive leaves, minced
1 garlic clove
1 tbsp minced parsley
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) white wine
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Boil the pasta in salted water.

Wash the chicory and blanch it in salted water. Strain it when it's still crunchy and immediately put it in ice water to cool. Then chop it.

Cube the swordfish and sear it with the oil in a very hot nonstick pan. Pour in the wine and let it evaporate completely. Add the chicory and season with salt and pepper to taste. Then add the parsley and chives along with a ladleful of pasta water.

Strain the pasta when it's al dente and combine it with the sauce. Top each serving with grated tuna roe.

FISH ROE

*Fish roe is a very particular food, characteristic of Sardinia. Its origins seem to date back several millennia, to when the Phoenicians colonized the island. But this fishy, amber colored item gets its Italian name (*bottarga*) from the Arabs, who were great aficionados. It seems that* bottarga *comes from the term* battarikh*, meaning "salted fish eggs." The ovary sac of a female mullet is removed according to ancient fishermen's wisdom (during the season when it contains thousands of eggs), then salted and dried. It's used in flakes, grated, or sliced very finely and enjoyed with vegetables, traditional local pastas, or even second courses. Sardinian* bottarga *is really the only product of this nature that can compete with caviar in terms of taste.*



BAVETTE CON PESCE SPADA, POMODORINI E FINOCCHIETTO

BAVETTE PASTA WITH SWORDFISH, CHERRY TOMATOES AND WILD FENNEL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

10.5 oz (300 g) bavette pasta
0.66 lbs (300 g) swordfish
0.66 lbs (300 g) cherry tomatoes (about 18)
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove
Zild fennel to taste
Salt, pepper and hot red pepper to taste

Method

Dice the swordfish and sear it in a nonstick pan with a bit of oil. Season it with salt, pepper and wild fennel to taste.

Separately, sauté the whole garlic clove and hot red pepper in the remaining oil. Slice the tomatoes in half and add them. Season with salt to taste and let them cook for a few minutes. Finally, add the fish.

Boil the pasta in salted water and strain it when it's al dente. Add it to the pan with the sauce and let everything cook together for a few seconds, mixing well, and serve.

SWORDFISH

Catching swordfish is a centuries-old ritual steeped in tradition. It's a bona fide battle between fish and man, the latter armed with harpoons and out to capture one of the princes of the Mediterranean (Mediterranean swordfish reach a maximum length of 10 ft/3m and weigh up to 772 lbs/350 kg). During the reproductive season, which is between June and August in the Mediterranean, swordfish begin a long migration toward the shore. This is when the fishermen take to the sea in specifically designed boats, ready for the hunt. A lookout, positioned in the crow's nest, alerts the rest to any swordfish sightings. According to legend, the sound of the Italian language was said to scare off the fish, so Sicilian and Calabrian fisherman spoke only Greek while out at sea, using common, standardized phrases. Not only were they sure this language wouldn't scare the fish, they believed that the ancient sounds would actually attract the fish, almost magically.



CAPUNTI CON CALAMARI E CAPOCOLLO DI MARTINA FRANCA

CAPUNTI PASTA WITH CALAMARI AND CAPOCOLLO SALAMI FROM MARTINA FRANCA

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 6' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 6 minutes)

PASTA
1 3/4 cups (300 g) re-milled durum wheat semolina
2/3 cup (150 ml) warm water
Salt to taste

SAUCE
0.77 lbs (350 g) medium squid
0.26 lbs (120 g) capocollo salami, in 1/32-inch slices
3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small)
1.1 lbs (500 g) tomatoes (about 3 large)
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Ligurian
3-4 basil leaves
1 tbsp minced parsley
1 garlic clove
Salt to taste

Method

Mix the flour and warm water until a smooth and elastic dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 15 minutes.

Shape the dough into strips about as thick as a finger and cut them crosswise into pieces about 2 inches (5 cm) long. Roll them back and forth on a lightly floured surface, pressing down firmly with three fingers.

Peel and mince the onion, then drizzle some oil in a pan and sauté the onion.

Clean the squid, slicing the bodies into rounds and cutting the tentacles in half. Add the squid to the onion and let it cook.

Wash the tomatoes, remove the seeds and dice them. In a large bowl, combine the tomatoes with the oil, the whole garlic clove (peeled and crushed), the basil leaves (roughly chopped) and a pinch of salt. Add this mixture to the squid and let everything cook for 15 minutes.

Julienne the capacollo and sear it separately in a bit of oil.

Boil the pasta in salted water and strain it when it's al dente. Combine it with the squid sauce, sprinkle it with parsley and serve it with the capacollo. Top it off with a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil.

FORM AND SUBSTANCE

The identity or divergence of form and substance has been the object of philosophical debate for centuries. But when it comes to pasta, anyone can tell you without fear of contradiction that form and substance appear to coincide. Throughout the world, pasta clearly connotes Italian cuisine, and presents endless potential variations in terms of shapes and seasonings. Every single one can be defined as "Italian," but at the same time each of them is distinct in flavor, consistency, thickness, and surface texture. In fact, it seems that each type has its own personality, which corresponds to the people who created it. From capunti *to* trofie*, moving on to* ruote, gramigna, *or the charming* farfalle, *a number of different Italian characters might actually be gleaned from the types of pasta they brought to life.*



COUS COUS TRAPANESE
TRAPANESE COUSCOUS

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 3 h (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 2 hours)

1 3/4 cups (300 g) durum wheat semolina for couscous (or precooked couscous)
2.2 lbs (1 kg) fish for soup (scorpionfish, tub gurnard, John Dory, cuttlefish, etc.)
0.88 lbs (400 g) ripe tomatoes (about 3 medium)
0.55 lbs (250 g) mussels
0.55 lbs (250 g) clams
4 shrimp
0.66 lbs (300 g) onion (about 4 1/2 small)
2.8 oz (80 g) carrots (about 1 1/2 small)
2.5 oz (70 g) celery (about 2 medium stalks)
2 garlic cloves
Parsley to taste
Hot red pepper to taste
Half a bay leaf
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

Method

Make the couscous by putting the semolina in a bowl and slowly pouring in the water, a few spoonfuls at a time. Mix it with your fingers until the flour forms tiny clumps. Add a few tablespoons of olive oil and rub the flour between your hands until uniform granules of couscous form. Add 1 tablespoon of oil to a pot of water and bring it to a boil. Put the couscous in a strainer and place it over the pot. Cover the strainer with the pot lid and let the couscous steam for about 2 hours, fluffing with a fork occasionally to keep it from sticking together. Skip this step if you're using precooked couscous.

Clean, scale, rinse and fillet the fish. Scrape the mussels and rinse them thoroughly. Flush out the clams and rinse them as well.

Place the discarded parts of the fish (head and bones) in a pot with half a bay leaf, a whole carrot, a celery stalk, and 5.3 oz (150 g) of onion (about 2 small). Cover them with cold water and bring it to a boil. The resulting fish broth needs to be filtered before you use it.

Put the clams and mussels in a pot with a tablespoon of oil. Let them cook until they open, then remove part of the shells.

Mince the garlic, hot pepper, remaining onion, and parsley. Heat the oil in a pan and sauté them, but don't let them start to brown. When they're cooked, add the tomatoes (peeled and diced with the seeds removed). Start adding the fish after a few minutes, beginning with those that need to cook the longest. Add the filtered broth along with the filtered liquid from the clams and mussels. Season with salt and let everything finish cooking. Add the shrimp, clams and mussels at the end, and season with salt to taste.

Place the couscous in a large container and add the hot fish broth in a 1:1 ratio. Mix thoroughly and cover it with plastic wrap, making sure it's well sealed. Let it sit for 30 minutes. Fluff the couscous wih a fork, add the fish sauce and serve.



CREMA DI BROCCOLI CON PANE CROCCANTE E NOCI

CREAMED BROCCOLI WITH CRUNCHY BREAD AND WALNUTS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 5' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 45 minutes)

1.1 lbs (500 g) broccoli
1.3 lbs (600 g) potatoes (about 3 medium)
3.5 oz (100 g) onion (about 1 1/2 small)
6 1/3 cups (1.5 L) water
2.1 oz (60 g) stale bread (about 1 3/4 cups diced)
4 walnuts
2 tsp (10 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Cut the broccoli and potatoes into small pieces and slice the onion.

Put the vegetables in a saucepan with the water and boil them, then purée them when they're done. Dilute the purée with a bit of water if necessary and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Dice the bread and toast it in a nonstick pan with a bit of oil.

Top the creamed broccoli with crispy bread and a few walnut pieces and serve.

VEGETABLE SOUPS

In the past, food was often a sign of individual identity and social belonging, and in some ways it still is. During the Middle Ages, the ecclesiastical category clearly demonstrated a person's alterity in comparison to others (through clothing and lifestyle). A monk's choice to follow a spiritual path, mortifying his body and denying himself all sensual pleasures, was even manifested in food. And medical and scientific theories at the time held that certain foods could induce temptation and incite inappropriate behavior in men of the church. So vegetable soups, which were often made with vegetables grown in the monastery gardens by the monks themselves, became a fundamental meal in the cloistral life. While the powerful flaunted their social status through food (abundant, rare, and original), farmers and the general population were left to a poor and simple diet without any choice in the matter. And in the middle, as far away and different from one end as the other, were the men and women of the church who renounced food as a sign of devotion. In short, as food historian Massimo Montanari emphasized, "even hunger became a luxury item" in the Middle Ages.



CREMA DI MELANZANE CON ORZO E ZUCCHINE
EGGPLANT PURÉE WITH ORZO AND ZUCCHINI

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 10' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

1.1 lbs (500 g) eggplant (about 1 medium)
5.3 oz (150 g) potatoes (about 1 small)
3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small)
1 cup (200 g) pearl barley
3.5 oz (100 g) zucchini (about 1/2 medium)
1 garlic clove
Sage, thyme and rosemary to taste
6 1/3 cups (1.5 L) vegetable broth
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Peel the eggplant (setting the skin aside) and cube it. Sprinkle it with salt and place it in a strainer for at least 15 minutes to let any bitter liquid drip off.

Meanwhile, roughly chop the onion and sauté it with the oil, garlic and herbs. Add the eggplant and let it brown, then add the potatoes. Season with salt and pepper and pour in the broth. Let the vegetables finish cooking and then purée everything together.

Pour in the barley and let it cook in the vegetable purée, adding more broth if necessary.

Dice the zucchini, sauté it and add it to the purée.

When the barley is cooked, serve the purée. Garnish with fried and finely sliced eggplant peel.

BARLEY

*Before wheat became the dominant crop, barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) was very popular throughout the Mediterranean because of its adaptability to the terrain, often poor, that was characteristic of the area. On the Italian peninsula, barley (orzo) long prevailed over other grains that are considered "inferior" today, perhaps unfairly. The ancient Greeks made soups and polentas from barley, which they consumed in large quantities. Roman gladiators also followed a barley-based diet, at least according to the writings of Pliny the Elder in* Naturalis Historia, *because it's a very high calorie and easily digestible grain. Barley is still commonly eaten in Italy, both because of its use in traditional dishes and because it's returned to popularity due to its nutritional properties. It's also very versatile and appears as the main ingredient in tasty soups,* polenta, focaccia, orzotto *(*risotto *made with orzo) and even fresh salads.*



FETTUCCINE AL RAGÙ DI VERDURE

FETTUCCINE IN VEGETABLE RAGÙ

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 46' (preparation: 40 minutes + cooking: 4-6 minutes)

PASTA
2 cups + 3 tbsp (300 g) Italian "00" flour
3 eggs
SAUCE
5.3 oz (150 g) tomatoes (about 1 1/2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) leeks (about 1/2 medium)
1.76 oz (50 g) eggplant (about 2/3 cup diced)
1.76 oz (50 g) zucchini (about 1/2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) red bell pepper (about 1/2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) yellow bell pepper (about 1/2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) carrots (about 1 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) celery (about 3 small stalks)
0.9 oz (25 g) peas (about 3 tbsp)
6 basil leaves
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

Method

Mix the flour and eggs until a smooth and homogenous dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Use a rolling pin or pasta machine to roll out sheets of dough just under 1/16 inch (1.5 mm) thick. Cut them into 1/4-inch (6 mm) wide strips.

Meanwhile, clean all of the vegetables. Dice the eggplant, sprinkle it with salt and let the liquid drain off. Dice the carrot, celery, peppers and zucchini.

Boil the peas in lightly salted water.

Slice the white part of the leek into rounds and sauté it in a bit of oil with the celery and carrot. Add all of the other vegetables, keeping track of their differing cooking times. Season with salt to taste. Add the tomato (peeled and diced, with seeds removed) and let everything cook for a few more minutes. Season with roughly chopped basil at the end.

Boil the pasta in salted water and combine it with the vegetable ragù. Sprinkle ground pepper on top and serve.



FREGOLA SARDA CON TRIGLIE E VONGOLE AL PROFUMO DI FINOCCHIETTO

FREGOLA SARDA PASTA WITH MULLET, CLAMS AND WILD FENNEL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 30'
(preparation: 1 hour 20 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

0.55 lbs (250 g) fregola sarda pasta
4 mullet, about 0.33 lbs (150 g) each
1.76 lbs (800 g) tellin clams
0.66 lbs (300 g) plum tomatoes (about 5)
0.7 oz (20 g) wild fennel (about 3 1/2 tbsp)
1 garlic clove
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) white wine
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

BROTH
5.3 oz (150 g) onions (about 2 small)
2.5 oz (70 g) celery (about 2 medium stalks)
2 cups (500 ml) water

Method

Scale, clean and fillet the mullet. Set aside the heads and bones, putting them in a pot with the vegetables and water for the broth. Let the broth simmer on low heat for about 1 hour.

Rinse the clams and flush them out thoroughly. Put them in a pot with a bit of oil, the whole garlic clove and the wine. Cover the pot and let the clams cook for a few minutes until they open. Remove 2/3 of the shells and filter the liquid from the pot.

When the broth is done, filter it through a fine mesh strainer and pour about 1 2/3 cups (400 ml) into a pot. Bring it back to a boil, adding a pinch of salt. Carefully add the pasta to the broth and let it boil for 10 minutes.

Cut the mullet into thick slices and sear them with the oil in a hot pan. Add the tomatoes (cut into quarters, with the seeds removed), the clams and the hand-torn fennel. Season with salt and pepper to taste, then add the liquid from the clams. Combine the pasta with the sauce (if you like, add a little bit of broth to make it creamier) and serve.



GNOCCHI DI MELANZANE CON PALAMITA, POMODORINI PACHINO E CIPOLLA DI TROPEA CROCCANTE

EGGPLANT GNOCCHI WITH ATLANTIC BONITO, PACHINO TOMATOES AND CRISPY TROPEA ONION

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 16'
(preparation: 1 hour 10 minutes + cooking: 6 minutes)

GNOCCHI
2.2 lbs (1 kg) eggplant (about 2 medium)
1 2/3 cup (200 g) all-purpose flour
1 2/3 cups (180 g) breadcrumbs
1 egg
Salt and pepper to taste
2 tbsp (30 ml) olive oil

SAUCE
0.55 lbs (250 g) Atlantic bonito fillet
0.44 lbs (200 g) Pachino tomatoes (about 2 large)
1 garlic clove
5.3 oz (150 g) Tropea onions (about 2 small)
1 tsp fresh thyme
1/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
2/3 cup (80 g) flour
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) milk
Olive oil for frying

Method

Peel the eggplant with a potato peeler and set aside some of the skin (to be julienned and fried for a garnish later). Cut the eggplant into slices, 3/4-1 inch (2-3 cm) thick. Sprinkle them with salt and let them drain for 20 minutes. Brush the slices evenly with olive oil and bake them in a preheated oven at 300° F (150° C) for about 45 minutes.

When they're done, transfer them to a food processor and blend them until they're creamy and homogenous. Transfer it to another container and let it cool. Combine it with the other gnocchi ingredients, quickly mixing them together. When the dough is ready, shape it into cylinders about 3/4 inch (2 cm) in diameter and cut them crosswise into pieces 3/4 inch (2 cm) long.

Cube the fish and sear it with the thyme and whole garlic clove. Add the tomatoes (washed and quartered, with seeds removed) and let everything cook for a few minutes, then remove it from the heat.

Julienne the onion and soak it in the milk for a few minutes. Strain it and dredge it in the flour. Fry it in boiling oil until it's crispy.

Boil the gnocchi in salted water and strain them as soon as they float to the surface. Combine them with the sauce and serve them with the crispy onion.



GNOCCHI DI PATATE AL POMODORO E BASILICO

POTATO GNOCCHI WITH TOMATO AND BASIL

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 20' (preparation: 1 hour 15 minutes + cooking: 4-5 minutes)

GNOCCHI
1.76 lbs (800 g) potatoes (about 4 medium)
1 1/2 cups (200 g) Italian "00" flour
1 egg
Salt to taste
TOMATO SAUCE
2.6 lbs (1.2 kg) ripe tomatoes (about 6 1/2 large)
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
5.3 oz (150 g) onions (about 2 small)
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (40 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
1 bunch of basil
1 1/4 tsp (5 g) sugar (optional)
Salt to taste

Method

Place the potatoes in a pot of cold unsalted water and bring it to a boil. When the potatoes are tender, peel and mash them on a flat work surface. Sift the flour and combine it with the potato, adding the egg and a pinch of salt. Work the dough with your hands until it's smooth and elastic. Shape it into cylinders about 1/2-2/3 inch (1.5 cm) thick and cut them crosswise into pieces about 3/4 inch (2 cm) long. To create the characteristic ridges, roll each piece over a fork or gnocchi board.

Rinse the tomatoes and remove the stems. Cut an X on the bottom of each one and blanch them, dropping them in boiling water for about 10 seconds and transferring them immediately to cold water. When they've cooled, peel them and cut them into quarters. Gently squeeze them to remove the seeds.

Finely chop the onion and sauté it with 4/5 of the oil. Soon after, add the tomatoes and half the basil. Let the sauce cook for 15-20 minutes, then remove the basil and pass the sauce through a vegetable mill. Add a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil to really enhance the flavor. If the sauce is too acidic, add a pinch of sugar.

Boil the gnocchi in salted water and remove them with a perforated spoon as soon as they float to the surface. Serve them in the tomato sauce, topped with the remaining basil (hand-torn) and grated Parmigiano.

GNOCCHI

Though gnocchi are not considered "real" pasta, they remain ever popular as a first course. In the Middle Ages, these tiny balls of dough were made from flour or breadcrumbs mixed with eggs and cheese, then boiled in water. When potatoes were introduced to Italian gastronomic culture in the modern era, the starchy tuber became the fundamental ingredient for gnocchi dough. Even the name has changed over time – they were actually called maccheroni *at first (a term derived from the word* macco, *which in turn came from* ammaccato, *meaning "crushed") and were a particularly popular item on the tables of southern Italian farmers.*



LINGUINE CON NASELLO, FAVE E OLIVE
LINGUINE WITH FAVA BEANS, OLIVES AND HAKE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 58' (preparation: 50 minutes + cooking: 8 minutes)

12.3 oz (350 g) linguine
0.44 lbs (200 g) fresh fava beans (about 1 1/3 cups)
0.55 lbs (250 g) hake fillets
1.76 oz (50 g) black olives (about 12 large)
1 oz (30 g) onion (about 1/2 small)
1 garlic clove
1 tbsp parsley
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

VEGETABLE BROTH
2 cups (500 ml) water
2.6 oz (75 g) onion (about 1 small)
1.4 oz (40 g) carrot (about 3/4 small)
1 oz (30 g) celery (about 1 medium stalk)

Method

Make the broth by adding the whole vegetables to the cold water. Let the water boil for about 30 minutes, then strain it and set it aside.

Finely chop the onion and sauté it in the oil with the whole garlic clove. When they've turned golden brown, add the chopped hake and season with salt and pepper. Blanch and peel the fava beans and add them to the sauce. Add enough broth to cover everything and let it cook for 10 minutes. Add the pitted and roughly chopped olives at the end.

Boil the pasta in salted water. Strain it when it's al dente and transfer it to the pan with the sauce. Let everything cook together for a minute, mixing well.

Sprinkle minced parsley and freshly ground pepper over each serving and drizzle cold-pressed olive oil on top.



MINESTRA DI CECI

CHICKPEA SOUP

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 40'
(preparation: 10 minutes + cooking: 1 hour 30 minutes)

0.88 lbs (400 g) dried chickpeas (about 2 cups)
3.5 oz (100 g) onion (about 1 1/2 small)
8 1/2 cups (2 L) vegetable broth
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (40 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 bunch of sage
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Soak the chickpeas in cold water for 12 hours. Strain them and put them in a pot with the sage, oil and sliced onion. Mix well, add the broth and let everything cook on low heat for 1 1/2 hours. Season with salt toward the end.

If you prefer a creamier consistency, purée some of the chickpeas and add them back to the soup.

Serve the soup with grated Parmigiano, freshly ground black pepper and a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil.

CHICKPEAS

Like all legumes of Eurasian origin, chickpeas have been eaten for tens of thousands of years. The classical period was their golden age. They were already highly appreciated by the Greeks, and the Romans also ate them in many different ways. The poet Horace confirms that his contemporaries were very fond of a sort of "chickpea cake" that was sold by street vendors, who did very good business. But the ancient Romans also ate these legumes boiled or roasted, the way we often eat peanuts. But soup is definitely the dish that best represents chickpeas. Every region of Italy still has its own recipe for this substantial specialty (relatively simple, with one or more ingredients added), which has served as a daily meal for farmers over the last few centuries. Chickpea soup could probably be called the queen of traditional Italian popular dishes.



ORECCHIETTE CON OMBRINA, COZZE, BROCCOLI E MAGGIORANA

ORECCHIETTE PASTA WITH UMBRINE, MUSSELS, BROCCOLI AND MARJORAM

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 9' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 8-9 minutes)

PASTA
1 3/4 cups (300 g) re-milled durum wheat semolina
2/3 cup (150 ml) water

SAUCE
0.44 lbs (200 g) umbrine
0.55 lbs (250 g) tomatoes (about 1 1/2 large)
0.66 lbs (300 g) mussels
0.44 lbs (200 g) broccoli
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) white wine
1 tsp minced marjoram
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Mix the flour and hot water until a smooth and elastic dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 15 minutes.

Shape the dough into cylinders as thick as your finger and cut them crosswise into pieces about 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm) long. Use the rounded tip of a butter knife to slide them over the work surface. Then use your thumb to form a depression in the center of each one, creating the typical concave orecchiette shape.

Clean the mussels thoroughly, scraping them with a knife and rinsing them well. Put them in a pot with the white wine and a tablespoon of oil. Let them cook until they open, then remove half the shells. Filter the liquid from the pot and set it aside.

Wash the broccoli and divide it into florets. Boil it in salted water and quickly transfer it to ice water to cool. Cut an X into the bottom of each tomato, then blanch them and transfer them immediately to ice water. Peel them, remove the seeds and dice them. Skin the fish, remove the bones and dice the fish.

Sauté the fish in a bit of oil, seasoning it with salt and pepper. When the fish is cooked, add the marjoram with the mussels and their water. Then add the broccoli and tomatoes.

Boil the pasta in salted water and strain it when it's al dente. Add it to the sauce along with a bit of the pasta water. Let everything cook together for a minute, mixing well. Top it off with a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil.



ORZO CON LEGUMI ALL'OLIO D'OLIVA, FORMAGGIO DI CAPRA ED ERBE AROMATICHE

BARLEY AND LEGUMES WITH OLIVE OIL, GOAT CHEESE AND HERBS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 10' + 24 h for the barley to soak
(preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

1 1/3 cups (250 g) barley
0.5 lbs (240 g) fresh Caprino cheese
2/3 cup (60 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
1.76 oz (50 g) spring onions (about 10 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) carrot (about 1 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) zucchini (about 1/2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) green beans (about 9 beans)
1.76 oz (50 g) celery (about 3 small stalks)
0.35 oz (10 g) chervil (about 1/4 cup + 1 tbsp)
0.35 oz (10 g) wild fennel (about 3 tbsp)
0.35 oz (10 g) parsley (about 1/4 cup + 2 tbsp)
6-7 chive leaves
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
5 cups (1.2 L) vegetable broth
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Dice all the vegetables and sauté them together with a bit of extra-virgin olive oil. Add a few tablespoons of broth while they cook and season them with salt to taste.

Mix the cheese with a tablespoon of oil and a pinch of black pepper.

After soaking the barley for 24 hours, boil it in unsalted water for 20 minutes. Strain it and rinse it under running water. Continue cooking it in a pot with a bit of oil, as you would for risotto, until it's al dente. Add the vegetables at the very end and season with salt to taste.

Stir in the remaining olive oil, minced herbs and grated Parmigiano.

Top each serving with a dollop of cheese, freshly ground pepper and a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil.

GATHERING HERBS

Since the dawn of western civilization, the plant kingdom was part of the female domain. The gathering of fruits, flowers, herbs, roots, and berries, which were essential not only as part of the daily meal, but also for making therapeutic decoctions, infusions, and creams, was reserved for women. In this sense, women represented the intersection of popular medicine (which led the way to modern herbal science), cooking, and knowledge of the earth. Until a few decades ago, a wise old sage called the medicina was a common presence in the Italian countryside. Based on secret knowledge passed down from generation to generation, she cured common illnesses using natural remedies along with a few magical formulas.



PANSOTTI CON SALSA DI NOCI
PANSOTTI PASTA WITH WALNUT SAUCE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 4' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 3-4 minutes)

PASTA
2 cups + 3 tbsp (300 g) Italian "00" flour
2 eggs
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) water
FILLING
0.33 lbs (150 g) ricotta
0.44 lbs (200 g) chard
0.33 lbs (150 g) borage
1 bunch of mixed aromatic herbs (marjoram, Salad burnet, chervil, dandelion)
2 1/4 tsp (5 g) nutmeg
2 eggs
2/3 cup (60 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
Salt and pepper to taste
SAUCE
1.76 oz (50 g) shelled walnuts (about 12)
0.5 oz (15 g) pine nuts (about 2 tbsp)
0.88 oz (25 g) stale white bread (about 1 slice)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) milk
1 garlic clove
1 tsp fresh marjoram
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) Ligurian extra-virgin olive oil
4 tbsp (20 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
Salt to taste

Method

Mix the flour and eggs until a smooth and elastic dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Rinse the aromatic herbs, but don't dry them. Put the wet herbs in a pot and steam them with a pinch of salt. Squeeze out any excess liquid and finely chop them.

Sift the ricotta and mix in the herbs and eggs. Add the grated Parmigiano and a pinch of nutmeg.

Use a rolling pin or pasta machine to roll the dough out to a thickness of about 1/32 inch (1 mm). Stamp out circles 2 1/3 inch (6 cm) in diameter. Use a pastry bag to place about 1 teaspoon of filling in the center of each one. Fold them over into half-moons and press down around the edges to seal them well.

Boil the walnuts for a few minutes to remove the skin. Remove the crust from the bread and soak it in the milk, then squeeze out any excess liquid. Put all the sauce ingredients in a food processor and blend until it reaches an even consistency.

Boil the pasta in salted water and combine it with the walnut sauce, adding a bit of pasta water to dilute it if necessary. Garnish with a few marjoram leaves.



PAPPA AL POMODORO

BREAD AND TOMATO SOUP

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 10 minutes + cooking: 30 minutes)

0.44 lbs (200 g) onions (about 3 small)
2.6 lbs (1.2 kg) ripe tomatoes (about 6 1/2 large)
1 cup (250 ml) water
0.7 oz (20 g) basil (about 1 cup whole leaves)
3 garlic cloves
1/2 tsp ground hot red pepper
1 loaf of stale rustic Tuscan bread, about 0.88-1.1 lbs (400-500 g)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Wash the tomatoes and cut an X into the bottom of each one. Blanch them, peel them and cut them into quarters. Remove the seeds and pass the tomato pieces through a vegetable mill.

Roughly chop the onion and sauté it in 4/5 of the oil with a whole garlic clove (to be removed later) and the hot pepper. Add the tomatoes and the water and let it cook on low heat. Season it with salt and pepper to taste.

Dice the bread and dry toast it in a nonstick pan. Add it to the tomatoes after they have cooked for about 25-30 minutes. Add the hand-torn basil as well. Cover the pan and let the bread soften.

Drizzle cold-pressed olive oil over each portion and serve.

HOT PEPPER

It seems absurd, but Christopher Columbus left for India in search of pepper and came back from America with peperoncino *(red chili pepper). The Europeans' discovery of America was partially due to the need for a safer and faster way to obtain spices, which were a valuable and fundamental element of aristocratic meals throughout the entire continent. But what Columbus found was not India, and the small, spicy plant he brought back was not ordinary pepper. Still, the somewhat similar taste along with the ease of working with* peperoncino *(compared to the more "difficult" spice from which it takes its name) led to its rapid spread, first in Spain and Portugal, then in other European countries. Unlike other American products (tomatoes, bell peppers, and especially potatoes), the chili pepper took only a few decades to make its way into local gastronomic cultures. Perhaps because it acclimated so perfectly to the Mediterranean climate, or because it was a spice affordable to all,* peperoncino *has now become indispensable to the majority of southern Italian cuisine.*



RAVIOLI DI CONIGLIO CON SALSA DI PISELLI E BASILICO

RABBIT RAVIOLI IN PEA AND BASIL SAUCE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 54' (preparation: 50 minutes + cooking: 3-4 minutes)

PASTA
2 cups + 3 tbsp (300 g) Italian "00" flour
3 eggs

FILLING
0.22 lbs (100 g) ricotta
0.66 lbs (300 g) rabbit
1/2 cup (50 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
1 tsp fresh marjoram
Nutmeg to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

SAUCE
7 oz (200 g) peas (about 1 1/3 cups)
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 oz (30 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, in flakes
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Mix the flour and eggs until a smooth and homogenous dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Cut the rabbit into small pieces and boil it in salted water for 10 minutes. Grind it and stir it into the sifted ricotta. Add the Parmigiano, marjoram and a pinch of salt and pepper.

Use a rolling pin or pasta machine to roll the dough out to 1/32 inch (1 mm) thickness. Cut it into 3-inch (8 cm) squares and place a tablespoon of filling in the center of each one. Fold them over to form rectangles and seal the edges well with a fork.

Blanch the peas in salted water, adding the basil leaves 30 seconds before removing the pot from the heat. Strain them (set aside some of the water) and quickly cool them off by putting them in ice water so they'll keep their natural bright green color. Strain the peas and basil again. Purée them with some of the water they cooked in, adding a bit of oil and salt and pepper to taste. Strain the purée with a fine mesh strainer.

Boil the ravioli in salted water. Strain them and drizzle them with cold-pressed olive oil. Serve them with the pea sauce, Parmigiano flakes and freshly ground pepper.



RAVIOLI DI ORATA CON MURICE E POMODORI SECCHI

SEA BREAM RAVIOLI WITH SEA SNAILS AND SUN-DRIED TOMATOES

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 6' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 6 minutes)

PASTA
2 1/2 cups (300 g) flour
3 eggs
1 egg white to seal the ravioli

FILLING
0.66 lbs (300 g) sea bream
3/4 cup + 3 tbsp (100 g) fresh breadcrumbs
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) milk
2 tbsp + 2 tsp (40 g) egg white
Nutmeg to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

SAUCE
2.2 lbs (1 kg) sea snails
4.2 oz (120 g) sun-dried tomatoes (about 1 cup)
5.3 oz (150 g) Tropea onions (about 2 small)
0.3 oz (10 g) anchovies packed in salt
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
1 oz (30 g) minced parsley (about 1/2 cup)
1 garlic clove
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Mix the flour and eggs until a smooth and homogenous dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Clean, scale, skin, debone and fillet the fish. Soak the breadcrumbs in milk and squeeze out any excess liquid. Combine the fish, breadcrumbs and egg white in a food processor. Season the filling with a pinch of salt, pepper and nutmeg.

Roll the dough out into two sheets, each 1/32 inch (1 mm) thick, and brush beaten egg white over one sheet. Use a pastry bag to place about a teaspoon of filling every 1 1/2-2 inches (4-5 cm). Lay the other sheet on top and press down gently around the filling to remove any air bubbles and seal the ravioli. Use a pastry cutter (preferably round and fluted) to stamp out the ravioli.

Put the sea snails in a pot of salted water and let them cook for 5 minutes from when it reaches a boil. Strain them and let them cool. Use a small fork, pin or toothpick to remove the snails from their shells.

Sauté the finely chopped onion in half the oil. When it's softened, add the minced garlic and the anchovies (rinsed and deboned). Add the snails and brown them. Pour in the wine and let it evaporate. Stir in the parsley and finely chopped sun-dried tomatoes. Add about 1 1/4 cups (300 ml) of water and let the sauce cook over low heat until it's very dense.

Boil the ravioli in salted water. Combine them with the sauce, adding a bit of cold-pressed olive oil, and serve.

RAVIOLI

Ravioli is an ancient gastronomic specialty. The name probably comes from raviggiuolo, *a cheese made from sheep's or goat's milk, which was the base for many fillings. Salimbene de Adam, the 13th century chronicler, seems to confirm that the name is linked more to the filling than the pasta dough it was wrapped in. He mentions eating filling that wasn't encased in dough, which he called "naked ravioli," so it follows that ravioli could be served with or without the pasta.*



RISOTTO AL PESTO DI FIORI DI ZUCCA CON GRANCHIETTI

SQUASH BLOSSOM RISOTTO WITH SMALL CRABS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people

Preparation time: 30' (preparation: 10 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

11.3 oz (320 g) rice
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
8-10 small crabs
5 cups (1.2 L) vegetable or fish broth
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) white wine

PESTO

3.5 oz (100 g) squash blossoms
1 1/2 tbsp (10 g) Pecorino cheese
2 1/2 tbsp (15 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp pine nuts
1/4 garlic clove
1 tbsp minced parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

To make the pesto, blend the squash blossoms (cleaned out and rinsed) with the pine nuts, grated cheeses, garlic and oil. Season it with salt and pepper to taste.

Heat the oil in a saucepan. When it's hot, add the rice and toast it for a few minutes, stirring continuously. When it's thoroughly toasted, add the white wine and let it evaporate completely. Add the crabs (divided into quarters) and let them cook. Pour in lightly salted hot broth as needed.

When the crabs are cooked, stir in the extra-virgin olive oil and pesto. Top with minced parsley.

RICE IN ITALY

Rice consumption in Italy has taken an ambiguous path with many ups and downs. The Arabs introduced to Spain and Sicily, but the rest of the Italian peninsula continued to view it as a different kind of grain. It was used for therapeutic purposes and sold in spice shops along with other imported items. The first record of rice crops being planted in northern Italy (and less sporadic rice consumption) dates to the 15th century. But the spread of rice hit another detour: it was considered a food particularly suited to the poor, the farmers, and the lower classes in general. Consequently, for reasons that were more symbolic than nutritional or gustative, it was prevented from making its way to the tables of wealthier families. It was only with the invention of delicacies like risotto *(in the north) and* timballi *and* sartù *(in the south) that rice started to break free of its reputation as a "poor man's food" and earn a place in the Italian tradition of high gastronomy.*



ROSETTE AI GAMBERI AL PROFUMO DI AGRUMI

ROSETTE PASTA WITH CITRUS-FLAVORED SHRIMP

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 45' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

PASTA
2 1/2 cups (300 g) all-purpose flour
3 eggs

FILLING
2 cups (500 ml) shellfish broth
1/2 cup (60 g) flour
0.7 oz (20 g) whole shrimp
1 tbsp parsley
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Zest of 1/4 orange
Zest of 1/4 lemon
Salt and pepper to taste

BROTH
Shrimp heads (from shrimp used for the filling)
3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small)
1 garlic clove
1 sprig of rosemary
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) brandy
2 1/2 cups (600 ml) water

TOPPING
3/4 cup (80 g) breadcrumbs
2 tsp (10 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Pour the flour onto a work surface and create a well in the center. Add the eggs and mix until a smooth and homogenous dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and let it sit for 30 minutes.

Clean and shell the shrimp, setting aside the heads.

Start the broth by heating the oil with the roughly chopped garlic, rosemary and onion. As soon as the onion starts to turn golden brown, add the shrimp heads. Let them brown, crushing them with a wooden spoon. Add the brandy and let it evaporate completely. Then add the water and let it cook for another 30 minutes. Season the broth with salt and pepper to taste and strain it with a fine mesh strainer.

Use a rolling pin or pasta machine to roll the dough out to about 1/32 inch (1 mm) thickness and cut it into 8 x 12 inch (20 x 30 cm) rectangles. Boil the pieces in salted water for 2 to 3 minutes and transfer them to a bowl of ice water to cool. Then lay them out to dry on a cloth.

Heat the oil and flour in a pan. Slowly add the broth, a little at a time, whisking continuously. When it's boiled for a few minutes, add the diced shrimp, grated lemon and orange zest and minced parsley. Season it with salt and pepper to taste.

Place a few tablespoons of filling on each sheet of dough and use a spatula to spread it evenly over the surface. Roll each one up lengthwise, then cut them crosswise into rounds about 1-1 1/2 inches (3-4 cm) wide.

Arrange them in a pan lined with parchment paper and sprinkle them with breadcrumbs. Drizzle olive oil on top and bake them at 350° F (180° C) for about 15 minutes.



SCIALATIELLI CON VONGOLE E CECI

SCIALATELLI PASTA WITH CLAMS AND CHICKPEAS

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 58' + 12 h for chickpeas to soak
(preparation: 50 minutes + cooking: 8 minutes)

PASTA
1 cup + 3 tbsp (200 g) durum wheat semolina
1 2/3 cups (200 g) all-purpose flour
1/2 cup (120 ml) milk
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (40 g) Pecorino cheese
1 egg

SAUCE
1.76 lbs (800 g) clams
0.35 oz (10 g) hot red pepper (about 4 tbsp)
3.5 oz (100 g) dried chickpeas (about 1/2 cup)
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) white wine
0.5 oz (15 g) thyme (about 6 tbsp)
1 garlic clove
1 tbsp parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Soak the chickpeas overnight.

Mix together all the *scialatielli* ingredients until the dough is smooth and homogenous. Wrap it in plastic and let it sit for at least 30 minutes.

Put the chickpeas in a pot of cold water and bring to a boil.

Use a rolling pin or pasta machine to roll the pasta dough out to a thickness of 1/16 inch (2 mm). Cut it into strips 1/8 inch (3 mm) wide and about 4-5 inches (10-15 cm) long.

Lightly brown the garlic, hot pepper and minced parsley in half the oil. Wash the clams well and let them cook until they've opened, then strain the liquid from the pan and remove some of the shells.

Purée the chickpeas, adding the remaining oil and a bit of water from the clams. Season the purée with salt and pepper.

Boil the pasta in salted water and strain it when it's al dente. Combine it with the chickpea purée and transfer it to the pan with the clams. Add the thyme and let everything cook together for a minute, mixing well. Serve immediately.



TIELLA DI RISO, PATATE E COZZE

BAKED RICE WITH POTATOES AND MUSSELS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 30 minutes)

8,8 oz (250 g) Ribe rice (about 1 1/3 cups)
3/4 cup + 1 tbsp (80 g) Pecorino cheese, grated
1.3 lbs (600 g) mussels
0.77 lbs (350 g) cherry tomatoes (about 20)
0.66 lbs (300 g) potatoes (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.4 lbs (180 g) onions (about 2 1/2 small)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
2-2 1/2 cups (500-600 ml) water
1 garlic clove
2 tbsp minced parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Carefully clean the mussels, scraping them under running water. Use a knife to open them (it's best to do this over a container to collect all the liquid that drains out, which will be used for cooking). Discard the empty shells.

Peel and slice the potatoes and onions. Mince the garlic. Cut half the tomatoes into wedges and leave the rest whole.

Grease an 8 x 12 inch (20 x 30 cm) pan with oil. Spread a layer of onions on the bottom. Distribute half the garlic, tomatoes and parsley over them. Sprinkle generously with salt and pepper, then grated Pecorino, and finish with half the sliced potatoes.

Cover everything with rice (rinsed and strained) and arrange the mussels on top.

Create another layer with the remaining garlic, tomatoes, parsley and potatoes. Sprinkle again with salt and pepper. Sprinkle the remaining Pecorino on top and drizzle with a generous amount of olive oil. Add 2-2 1/2 cups (500-600 ml) of water to the liquid from the mussels and pour it over everything.

Bake at 350° F (180° C) for about 45 minutes, or until the rice is fully cooked.

TIELLA

As is often the case in the gastronomic domain, tiella *is a traditional dish (the Puglian version is presented here) that gets its name from the container it's made in. As time passed and culinary customs shifted, every family reinterpreted this ancient recipe and in a sense, made it their own. The basic ingredients (rice, potatoes, mussels, tomatoes, and in some versions, zucchini) are common and inexpensive, available to all. This recipe may have been inspired by the sea, but it hasn't forgotten its agricultural roots.*



TORTELLI DI BURRATA CON SARDE E PESTO DI FRUTTA SECCA

BURRATA CHEESE TORTELLI WITH SARDINES AND DRIED FRUIT PESTO

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 45 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

PASTA
2 cups + 3 tbsp (300 g) Italian "00" flour
3 eggs

FILLING
0.66 lbs (300 g) burrata cheese
1/2 cup (50 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

SAUCE
1.3 lbs (600 g) sardines, already cleaned
0.4 lbs (180 g) ripe tomatoes (about 2 small)
2.8 oz (80 g) sun-dried tomatoes (about 3/4 cup)
5.3 oz (150 g) Ramata di Milano onions (about 2 small)
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

PESTO
0.35 oz (10 g) pine nuts (about 1 tbsp)
0.5 oz (15 g) shelled pistachios (about 22)
0.5 oz (15 g) golden raisins (about 1 1/2 tbsp packed)
0.88 oz (25 g) wild fennel (about 1/4 cup)
0.88 oz (25 g) mint (about 1/4 cup)
0.88 oz (25 g) fresh oregano or marjoram (about 1/4 cup)
1 1/2 tbsp (10 g) aged Pecorino cheese
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Mix the flour and eggs until a smooth and homogenous dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Finely chop the burrata, season it with a pinch of salt and pepper and put it in a pastry bag.

Roll the dough out to a thickness of about 1/32 inch (1 mm) and stamp out 2 1/3 inch (6 cm) circles. Place some filling in the center of each one and fold them over to create half-moon tortelli.

Peel the tomatoes, remove the seeds and dice the tomatoes. Julienne the onion and sauté it over medium heat with the olive oil. Add the sardines (chopped into small pieces) and let them cook for a few minutes, then add the fresh tomatoes. After a minute, add the sun-dried tomatoes (finely chopped) and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Blend all the pesto ingredients for a few seconds (it shouldn't be too smooth).

Boil the pasta in salted water. Strain it and combine it with the sardine sauce.
Top it with pesto and serve.



TORTELLI DI PATATE CON FASOLARI E CIME DI RAPA

POTATO TORTELLI WITH COCKLES AND TURNIP GREENS

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 6' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 6 minutes)

PASTA
2 1/4 cups + 2 1/2 tbsp (300 g) all-purpose flour
3 eggs

FILLING
0.88 lbs (400 g) white potatoes (about 2 medium)
2/3 cup (60 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
0.35 oz (10 g) fresh oregano (about 2 tbsp)
salt and nutmeg to taste

SAUCE
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
24 cockles
0.6 lbs (280 g) turnip greens
2 tsp (10 ml) white wine
1 garlic clove
1 bay leaf
1 tbsp minced parsley

Method

Mix the flour and eggs until a smooth and homogenous dough forms. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Boil the unpeeled potatoes in salted water. Peel them and mash them or pass them through a vegetable mill. When they've cooled to room temperature, mix them with the Parmigiano, parsley and a pinch of salt and nutmeg.

Roll the dough out to a thickness of about 1/32 inch (1 mm) and cut out 2 1/3 inch (6 cm) squares. Place some filling in the center of each one and fold them over to create rectangular tortelli. Press gently around the edges and seal them with a fluted pastry wheel.

Sauté the whole garlic clove with a couple of tablespoons of oil. Add the cockles (already flushed out) and pour in the white wine. Cover the pan and let them cook until they open. As soon as they do, take them off the heat and remove some of the shells. Season them with salt.

Wash the turnip greens and roughly chop them. Boil them in salted water with the tortelli. Strain everything together and combine it with the cockle sauce. Drizzle with cold-pressed olive oil and serve.

STUFFED PASTAS

Everything deserving of this name must be celebrated with a primo piatto *(first course) of stuffed pasta, either in sauce or broth. Pasta is the quintessential dish of the populace, and once it's stuffed – with meat, fish, dairy products, or herbs – it becomes a holiday specialty. This delicacy was born of Italian ingenuity during the Middle Ages. According to food historian Massimo Montanari, the medieval predilection for cakes (dough filled with a host of wonderful ingredients, often in several layers) inspired the creation of these gastronomic jewels. The small bundles of dough were a reproduction of cakes in miniature, the size of a single mouthful. No better idea has ever existed, and this hypothesis is supported by the etymological closeness of* torta *(cake) and* tortelli *(the shrunken version). Every city in Italy has its own stuffed pasta specialty, each with its own history and legends surrounding its origin. But all of them are unquestionably and exquisitely Italian for all intents and purposes.*



TORTIGLIONI AL RAGÙ DI CARNI BIANCHE
TORTIGLIONI WITH WHITE MEAT RAGÙ

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 20′ (preparation: 40 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

12.3 oz (350 g) tortiglioni pasta
0.22 lbs (100 g) rabbit
0.22 lbs (100 g) guinea fowl
0.33 lbs (150 g) pork
1.76 oz (50 g) turkey breast
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) white wine
1.76 oz (50 g) onion (about 3/4 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) carrots (about 1 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) celery (about 3 small stalks)
1 sprig of rosemary
1 bunch of sage
1 bay leaf
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt, pepper and nutmeg to taste

Method

Wash and dice the onion, celery and carrot. Sauté them over medium heat with half the oil.

Meanwhile, dice all of the meats. Add them to the vegetables and brown them over high heat until all the liquid is absorbed. Pour in the white wine and let it evaporate. Add the herbs and let the meat finish cooking, adding a bit of water if necessary. Season with salt, pepper and a pinch of nutmeg.

Boil the pasta in salted water and strain it when it's al dente. Add it to the sauce, along with a bit of pasta water and the remaining oil. Let it all cook together for a minute, mixing well, and serve.

BARNYARD ANIMALS

The white meat category includes all animals that were once defined as "barnyard" animals: chickens, geese, ducks, and rabbits. There was no country house or homestead without a flock of animals running freely around the yard. The availability of meat was vital to the Mediterranean family, especially because these small animals were the only source of protein they had. And chickens had a double advantage – they laid eggs almost year round, and once they got old they could be used to make good stock for the holidays. Today white meat is making a grand comeback – it's healthy, light, easily digested, versatile, and tastes great.



TROFIE AL PESTO E VONGOLE

TROFIE PASTA AND CLAMS IN PESTO SAUCE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 5' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 5 minutes)

2 1/2 cups (300 g) all-purpose flour
2/3 cup (150 ml) water
2.2 lbs (1 kg) clams
1 oz (30 g) basil (about 1 1/4 cups)
0.53 oz (15 g) pine nuts (about 2 tbsp)
2/3 cup (60 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (40 g) aged Pecorino cheese, grated
1 garlic clove
0.22 lbs (100 g) green beans (about 18 beans)
0.44 lbs (200 g) potatoes (about 1 1/2 small)
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Ligurian
Salt to taste

Method

Pour the flour onto a work surface and create a well in the center. Add the water a little at a time and mix until the dough is relatively dense and elastic. Wrap it in plastic and let it sit for 30 minutes before working with it further.

Flush any sand out of the clams and rinse them well in cold water. Put them in a covered pot over high heat (with no liquid except for the water that remains on them after rinsing) and let them cook until they open.

Pinch off pieces of dough the size of a chickpea and roll them into thin strips between your hands (or roll them on a work surface, exerting slight pressure with your palm) to make the trofie.

Rinse the basil and lay it on a towel to dry. Crush the basil in a mortar with the pine nuts, garlic, oil, a pinch of salt and the grated cheeses. You can also do this in a food processor, using the pulse setting so the pesto doesn't overheat. Pour it all into a bowl and cover it with a layer of extra-virgin olive oil.

Dice the potatoes and cut the green beans into small pieces. Boil them in salted water, and when they're almost done add the pasta to the pot. Strain everything and add it to the pot of clams. Let it all cook together for a minute, then remove it from the heat. Combine it with the pesto and mix well, adding a bit of pasta water and olive oil.

GENOAN PESTO

The fragrance and flavor of Ligurian basil is unmistakable, and they are produced by the microclimate and terrain of Liguria. Sandwiched between the sea and the mountains, all of the region's history and character can be found in pesto. It's really a "poor man's" sauce, made with an herb that was not valued nearly as much as many others until the Middle Ages. Just mix basil with one part Parmesan cheese and one part Pecorino cheese, then add garlic, pine nuts and extra-virgin olive oil made from local olives and you're all set. Of course, the method of preparation cannot be discounted – even the physical movements are part of gastronomic history. The basil must be rigorously crushed (the word "pesto" comes from pestare, *"to crush") with a wooden pestle in a mortar made from the marble of Carrara (another area that has always been linked to Liguria). Only this process can slowly and patiently release the intense aroma of this simple sauce, making every mouthful a memorable experience.*



VELLUTATA DI ZUCCA E PATATE CON FAGIOLI CANNELLINI

CREAMY POTATO AND PUMPKIN SOUP WITH CANNELLINI BEANS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 5' + 12 h for the legumes to soak
(preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 45 minutes)

1.1 lbs (500 g) pumpkin (including rind)
1.3 lbs (600 g) potatoes (about 3 medium)
3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small)
7 oz (200 g) cannellini beans (about 1 cup)
6 1/3 cups (1.5 L) water
1 sprig of thyme
1 sprig of rosemary
2 tsp (10 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean the pumpkin, peel the potatoes and cut them both into small pieces. Slice the onion.

Put them all in a saucepan, add enough water to cover them and bring it to a boil. When the vegetables are cooked, purée them along with the liquid they cooked in. Dilute with a bit of water if necessary and season with salt and pepper.

Separately boil the beans in about 8 1/2 cups (2 L) of water, after they've soaked for 12 hours.

Stir the beans into the potato and pumpkin soup just before serving it. Top each serving with minced thyme and rosemary, freshly ground pepper and a dash of olive oil.

PUMPKIN

Pumpkins are not of Italian origin, but they were adopted and assimilated well, and the many varieties were used in all kinds of wonderful recipes. Their sweetness made them particularly ideal for stuffed pastas, or sweet-and-sour and sweet-and-spicy sauces. After the Americas were discovered and various species were imported (larger and with more pulp than native varieties), the timid use of pumpkin for cooking began, mostly in the northern rural areas. Pumpkin tortelli *are still an obligatory "lean" first course for the traditional Christmas Eve dinner in many families, especially in the Po Valley.*



ZUPPA DI CEREALI E LEGUMI

LEGUME AND WHOLE GRAIN SOUP

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 20' + 12 h hours for legumes to soak
(preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 1 hour)

3.5 oz (100 g) pearl barley (about 1/2 cup)
3.5 oz (100 g) spelt (about 1/2 cup)
3.5 oz (100 g) lentils (about 1/2 cup)
3.5 oz (100 g) Borlotti beans (about 1/2 cup)
3.5 oz (100 g) frozen peas (about 3/4 cup)
0.33 lbs (150 g) potatoes (about 1 small)
1 tbsp + 2 tsp (25 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Half a garlic clove
Thyme to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Separately soak the dried legumes and grains in cold water overnight.

Strain the legumes and put them in a pot with the diced potato, garlic, and thyme. Add enough water to cover them and bring it to a boil.

Add the grains, keeping track of the varying cooking times.

Season the soup with salt toward the end and add the peas last (they only need to cook for a few minutes).

Serve the soup, topping it with freshly ground pepper and a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.

LEGUME AND WHOLE GRAIN SOUPS

If there is one dish that represents the full gamut of Italian gastronomic culture, it is most definitely legume and whole grain soup. It's been eaten by all social classes in every era since the classical period, has evolved into dozens of variations while still remaining immediately recognizable, and it's nutritionally complete and well balanced. This dish offers a tasty harmony of grains (mostly those that are considered inferior – barley, farro, millet), which have always been the basis of daily nourishment for the masses, and legumes, the so-called "poor man's meat," which was an indispensable resource for the lower classes and often their only source of protein (vegetable, naturally). Various types of grains and legumes are often combined in these rich and nutritious soups. They are both ingredients that can be dried out and kept for long periods of time in warehouses or private stores. So it's possible that these mixtures were born of a need to use up all available remnants during eras when waste was not an option. Reading medieval cookbooks, it's clear that soups were well received in aristocratic homes as well, further confirming that cooking is capable of achieving a sort of unity above and beyond distance and social class.



SECOND COURSES



Symbolically, the *secondo piatto* (second course) is definitely the most substantial and distinguished course on an Italian menu. The fact that it's referred to as "second" has nothing to do with hierarchical classifications, as it's probably an anomalous cultural vestige of two traditions merging. Both the *primo piatto* (first course) and the secondo piatto are considered main courses, but it seems that each label implies a certain history and concept of food, and the differences therein are so great they seem irreconcilable. So much so that today – granted, Italian eating habits are changing and the traditional meal is starting to give way to the more "international" one-course meal – you often see customers choosing one over the other in restaurants. It's a choice that depends far more on individual taste than diet or nutrition. But either way, it's possible to attempt a symbolic reading of this behavior: women often prefer first courses or fish-based second courses, while men opt for meat-based second courses. So the ancient cultural legacy is still valid: meat (a food closer to the instinctual, feral, wild aspect of human nature) seems destined for men, while the more serene pasta seems destined for the less bellicose female gender.

If this cursory discussion about the presumed origins of the secondo piatto were to factor in how much the Christian-Catholic tradition has influenced the daily life of the Italian people for centuries, regulating every day down to the tiniest detail, we would find a sufficient explanation for the antinomy (still very strict and clear for this course) between meat and fish.

It's important to remember that the choice between meat and fish for the second course is not universal (or unquestionable and absolute). It's a result of the need to abstain from foods that provoke instinct, aggressiveness, and lust (a category that included red meat), which was a regulation imposed on the daily diet until at least the 19th century.

To understand the impact such a religious dictate would have on dietary choices, consider that there were about 150 "lean" days distributed throughout the year. And for further proof, it should suffice to point out that before the rise of Christianity, the Roman civilization had no problem accepting the presence of meat and fish in the same recipe, and in other parts of the world these sorts of "mixed" dishes are still common.

Continuing down the same path we've been treading, regarding the plausible origins of the Italian gastronomic system (the only one in the world with two main courses), there's nothing left to add but one last reflection. The two traditions that converged, leading to the *primo* and *secondo*, are disparate not only in terms of culture (one seems to derive from the Greco-Roman tradition, and the other from Celtic-German), but also in terms of social class. The first course tends (since it would be impossible and incorrect to draw an absolute and incontrovertible line of separation) to represent the popular tradition best, while the second course more adequately embodies the culinary culture of the higher classes. But it should be noted that this contrast has been softened considerably by the "Mediterraneanness" to which this book is dedicated.

In conclusion, a glance at the menu of a good, traditional restaurant, much like a quick flick through a well organized cookbook, seems to put us in direct contact with the history of Italy and the culture of its people.



ACCIUGHE IN TEGAME CON POMODORO, CAPPERI E OLIVE TAGGIASCHE

ANCHOVIES WITH TOMATOES, CAPERS AND TAGGIASCA OLIVES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) fresh anchovies
2.8 oz (80 g) Taggiasca olives (about 18 large)
1 oz (30 g) salt-packed anchovies
7 oz (200 g) crushed tomatoes
0.35 oz (10 g) capers, well-rinsed (about 1 tbsp)
1/4 cup + 2 tsp (70 ml) white wine
1 garlic clove
1 oz (30 g) parsley (about 1/2 cup)
2 tbsp (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

Method

Clean and debone the anchovies. Slice them in half lengthwise and open them up.

Heat the oil in a pan. Add the garlic and minced parsley and let them cook but don't let them brown. Add the white wine and let it evaporate, then add the crushed tomatoes. Add the salt-packed anchovies (first rinse them well, remove the bones and roughly chop them) along with the capers and let them cook for a few minutes. Finally, add the fresh anchovies and olives. Let everything cook for a couple more minutes, season with a pinch of salt and serve.

CAPERS

*Capers (*Capparis spinosa*) are the small, oblong, spindle-shaped buds produced by a shrub that grows wild in calcareous substrates throughout the Mediterranean basin, and therefore appears in many areas of Italy. Eaten for millennia, capers exemplify knowledge of the terrain and optimal utilization of every resource, even in the wild. Packed in salt, vinegar, or oil, this humble fruit of the earth became part of many typical southern Italian dishes, lending its strong, intense, permeating flavor to an important part of Italian cuisine.*



ARROSTICINI DI AGNELLO AL TIMO

ROASTED LAMB SKEWERS WITH THYME

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 50 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) lamb
2.65 lbs (1.2 kg) potatoes (about 3 1/2 large)
2 garlic cloves
2 sprigs of thyme
1 oz (30 g) rosemary (about 1/2 cup + 1 tbsp)
2/3 cup (150 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Cut the lamb into 1/3-3/4 inch (1-2 cm) cubes and slide them onto the skewers.

Peel the potatoes and cut them into wedges. Blanch them for 5 minutes, strain them and place them in a preheated baking dish with half the oil, 1 garlic clove, salt and pepper. Bake them at 350° F (180° C) for 30 minutes.

Strip the thyme from the stem and thinly slice the other garlic clove. Spread them over the skewers and drizzle the remaining olive oil on top. Let the meat marinate for at least 20-30 minutes in the refrigerator.

To keep the garlic and thyme from burning, remove them from the meat before grilling it. Let the skewers warm up to room temperature for about 10 minutes. Cook them on a grill or flat griddle for about 10 minutes, seasoning with salt and pepper to taste.

ROASTING MEAT

In the Italian gastronomic tradition, as in many others, there are various established cooking methods that harbor symbolic meanings. And though their origins are remote, they continue to exercise their influence. Roasting is a perfect example of this. Technically a fire and a spit would suffice for roasting meat, and every addition to this basic procedure is a nonessential surplus attributable to gastronomic techniques being perfected and palates becoming progressively refined. In the Middle Ages, an era when even eating habits denoted social status, consuming roasted meat had a specific meaning. First and foremost, meat (especially red meat) was a luxury afforded to a privileged few. Secondly, the almost primitive simplicity of this cooking method made it ideal for the noble warrior classes, whose stomachs were as powerful as their swords. At the time, every class, genre, age, and type of human had its own diet, cemented over centuries, which was based on the standards of either Hippocratic or Aristotelian dietary "science." Roasts, which evoked the concepts of strength, simplicity, and wildness, were the technique best suited to great monarchs, princes, and warriors. The monk Einhard was Charlemagne's contemporary and biographer, and following a physical description of the king and his honest ways, he wrote that Charlemagne rarely consumed anything at banquets and ate in great moderation, but he enjoyed the roasts cooked by hunters – very simply, on a spit – more than anything. Charlemagne's carnivorous, almost monophagous diet is further proof of the king's vigor, presence, and righteousness. As Feuerbach said, "you are what you eat."



BRANZINO ALL'ACQUA PAZZA
SEA BASS IN "ACQUA PAZZA"

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 15 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

3.3 lbs (1.5 kg) sea bass
5.3 oz (150 g) onion (about 2 small)
0.55 lbs (250 g) cherry tomatoes (about 15)
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
5 basil leaves
2 garlic cloves
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) water
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean and thinly slice the onions. Clean and fillet the sea bass, removing all the bones.

Sauté the onion, garlic and basil in the extra-virgin olive oil. Add the tomatoes and water and let everything cook for about 10 minutes. Season the fish with salt and pepper, then place it in the acqua pazza (crazy water) and let it cook.

ACQUA PAZZA

Acqua pazza *(literally, "crazy water") was originally a sort of traditional maritime soup. Fishermen would take the small discarded fish that remained tangled in the nets (and therefore went unsold) and boil them in seawater with vegetables and spices. The recipe got its name, which is still used today, when a bit of white wine was added to the water. Popular throughout the Mediterranean, especially in Provence and southern Italy, it was a frugal yet wholesome one-course meal usually eaten with hard tack biscuits called* gallette *or* friselle. *It's important to note that every region of Italy offers fish dishes modeled on this basic soup – water, salt, and spices, occasionally enriched with eggs, cheese, scraps of meat, or bones, depending on the traditional products available in the area.*



BRANZINO IN MANTO DI MELANZANE CON SALSA DI ZAFFERANO E CIPOLLA GRATINATA ALLE ACCIUGHE

SEA BASS WRAPPED IN EGGPLANT WITH SAFFRON SAUCE AND BAKED ONION WITH ANCHOVIES

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 10' (preparation: 1 hour+ cooking: 10 minutes)

1.1 lbs (500 g) coarse salt
2 sea bass, 1.3 lbs (600 g) each
1.76 oz (50 g) anchovies packed in oil
1.76 oz (50 g) Roma rice (about 1/4 cup)
1.1 lbs (500 g) eggplant (about 1)
0.88 lbs (400 g) Ramata di Milano onions (about 2 1/2 large)
1 1/4 cups (150 g) breadcrumbs
1.4 oz (40 g) minced parsley (about 1/2 cup + 2 tbsp)
1 cup (250 ml) water
2 tsp (10 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
0.02 oz (0.5 g) saffron (about 3/4 tsp)
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Pour the coarse salt into a baking dish and arrange the whole, unpeeled onions on top. Bake the onions at 350° F (180° C) for 30 minutes, or until they're easily pierced with a knife. When they're done, cut the onions in half and season them with a pinch of salt and pepper.

Combine the breadcrumbs with the minced parsley and anchovies (broken up with a knife) and spread the mixture over the onion halves. Drizzle olive oil on top and bake them in a preheated oven at 400 ° F (200° C) for 7-8 minutes. Meanwhile, use a mandoline to slice the eggplant about 1/16-1/8 inch (2-3 mm) thick.

Scale the sea bass and remove the bones, then rinse the sea bass and fillet them. Season the fillets with salt and pepper and cover them with eggplant slices.

Boil the rice in lightly salted water for at least 20 minutes, then purée it with the saffron and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Drizzle a bit of oil in a nonstick pan and sear the fish for 2-3 minutes on each side. Let it finish cooking in the oven at 350° F (180° C) for 5 minutes.

Serve the bass over the puréed rice with the baked onions on the side.

SAFFRON YELLOW

Italian gastronomic culture has always been able to adopt items from other traditions and fully integrate them by enhancing, reinterpreting, and valorizing them in unique ways. Such is the case for saffron. Though it had been known for its coloring, therapeutic, and aromatic properties since antiquity, it was the Arabs who made it immensely popular throughout Europe and officially gave it the name that is still used today. The world za'faran *actually means "yellow" in Arabic. It has always been very expensive, and therefore highly appreciated, due to its rarity and the difficulties faced in cultivating and harvesting it (saffron substitutes are still sold today and the real thing is only produced in a few parts of the world, including L'Aquila). It seems that a sort of "privateer war" developed over saffron between the 13th and 14th centuries, after a shipment of 794 lbs (360 kg) of precious stigmas was hijacked and stolen. To get a vague idea of saffron's true value, consider that today the shipment would have been worth millions of dollars.*



CAPESANTE ARROSTITE CON PUREA DI PISELLI E OLIO AL NERO DI SEPPIA

ROASTED SCALLOPS WITH PURÉED PEAS, OIL AND CUTTLEFISH INK

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 35 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

12 scallops
0.88 lbs (400 g) peas (about 2 3/4 cups)
0.18 oz (5 g) cuttlefish ink
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (90 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Boil the peas in salted water. Strain them and blend them in a food processor, adding a ladleful of the water they were cooked in. Then pass them through a fine mesh strainer, which should result in a fairly dense purée. Season it with 1/3 of the oil and salt and pepper to taste.

Dilute the cuttlefish ink with 1/3 of the olive oil.

Open the shells, remove the scallops and rinse them well. Sear them in a very hot pan with the remaining oil, seasoning with salt and pepper to taste.

When they're done (they should cook in about 5 minutes), serve the scallops over a layer of puréed peas. Top them with the mixture of olive oil and cuttlefish ink.

SCALLOPS

The history of scallops is very tightly woven with that of Christianity and religious liturgy. In fact, they're also known as "shells of St. James." Pilgrims who traveled to Santiago de Compostela (in Galicia) would collect scallop shells along the beaches and present them upon returning, both as proof of their journey and a way to avoid tolls and tallages. Even art history provides a splendid image of this jewel of nature – Botticelli's Venus rising from a scallop shell. In any case, scallops are the third most consumed mollusk in the world. They are extremely versatile, lending themselves to an infinite variety of recipes. And given their beauty, they are also a wonderful decorative element that greatly contributes to the table's aesthetic appeal.



CAPESANTE CON PATATE E FUNGHI PORCINI

SCALLOPS WITH POTATOES AND PORCINI MUSHROOMS

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 5' (preparation: 45 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

Salt to taste
White pepper to taste
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Ligurian
12 scallops
1.3 lbs (600 g) potatoes (about 3 medium)
0.88 lbs (400 g) fresh porcini mushrooms
1 garlic clove
1 bunch of chives
1 tsp (5 ml) vinegar
2 sprigs of rosemary

Method

Peel the potatoes and use a very sharp knife to cut them into rounds.

Boil them for about 20 minutes in salted water with a bit of vinegar.

Clean the mushrooms, wiping them with a damp cloth, and then thinly slice them.

Place a pan over high heat. When it's hot, add the oil, a whole garlic clove (unpeeled), a sprig of rosemary and the mushrooms. Season them with salt and pepper. Let the mushrooms cook for a few minutes, making sure they stay firm.

Drizzle some oil into another very hot pan. Add the scallops with salt and pepper to taste. Let them cook for a few minutes, turning them over until every side is done.

Serve the scallops with the potatoes and mushrooms, garnishing each plate with rosemary and chives. Top each serving with a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil and a sprinkle of white pepper.

EXQUISITE, PERFIDIOUS MUSHROOMS

The story goes that Roman emperor Claudius (10-54 AD) died of his own gluttony. His wicked and extremely ambitious wife, Agrippa, wanted her son by a previous marriage, Nero, to ascend to the throne. To speed things up, she decided to kill her husband by taking advantage of his well-known predilection for mushrooms. Like many of his contemporaries, Claudius was indeed a big fan of these exquisite and mysterious products of the soil. So his wife had some of the most poisonous boletes collected, cooked to perfection, and served. The emperor devoured them enthusiastically and met his famous end. Whether this is truth or legend, the fact remains that wild mushrooms – delicious, yet potentially poisonous or even lethal – have always held a dubious fascination for humans, and eating them safely requires great skill and knowledge, as much today as it did back then.



CONIGLIO ALLE OLIVE

RABBIT WITH OLIVES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 15 minutes + cooking: 45 minutes)

1 rabbit
3.5 oz (100 g) Taggiasca olives (about 23 large)
7 oz (200 g) tomato purée
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
3 garlic cloves
1 sprig of rosemary
Salt to taste

Method

Cut the rabbit into smaller pieces and season it with salt. Sauté it with the oil, rosemary and garlic (unpeeled). When it's uniformly browned, pour in the white wine and let the wine evaporate completely. Cover the pan and let it cook on medium heat for 20 minutes, checking to make sure it doesn't get too dry and adding some water if necessary.

Add the tomato purée and pitted olives. Let it cook for another 20 minutes, then let the sauce thicken to the desired consistency.

Serve the rabbit in the sauce, very hot, and don't forget to remove the garlic.

OLIVES

*Some parts of the Italian landscape, especially in the south, are easily recognizable by the silvery reflection of olive trees (*Olea europaea*). Along with grapes and wheat, olives are part of the so-called "Mediterranean triad", referring to the three plants that have most contributed to the agrarian economy, gastronomy, and eating habits of the nations located on the Mediterranean. The history of olive cultivation is lost in the annals of time. Mortars and presses for oil production, dating to the 5th millennium BC, have been uncovered in Haifa (Israel). Written sources also make numerous references to olives. Consider the section of the Old Testament where the dove returns to Noah's ark carrying a fresh olive branch. In Jewish culture the olive is a symbol of peace and the covenant between Yahweh and man and the oil becomes a symbol of purification and consecration. The practice of anointing was later assimilated into Christianity and it's essential for the celebration of the sacraments. Islam considers the olive to be the allegorical center and axis of the world, the cosmic tree, a symbol of the Prophet. In classical civilization, the ancient Greeks believed that it was Athena, goddess of wisdom, who bestowed the olive tree upon Attica. Olive oil was also parts of the Eleusinian Mysteries, but in everyday life it was used for food, ointment, personal hygiene, and light. The olive has lost some of these profound mystical and cult meanings, but it remains fundamentally important to the diets of Mediterranean populations. The Romans were highly dedicated to the cultivation of this extraordinary plant, and olives are still widely cultivated in Italy today. In fact, the extraordinary variations in terrain and microclimates make Italy quite unique – there are over 500 cultivars grown throughout the country, 400 of which are listed in the national index. Each one provides fruit (olives) and oil of incomparable taste and organoleptic quality, making Italy the home of indisputably excellent oil production.*



COZZE ALLA MARINARA
MUSSELS MARINARA

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 25' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) mussels
0.44 lbs (200 g) ripe tomatoes (about 1 1/2 medium)
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
Parsley to taste
Hot red pepper to taste
1 garlic clove
Salt to taste

Method

Heat the oil in a pan. Add the hot pepper, garlic and parsley, all minced. Let them cook but make sure they don't start to turn golden brown. Add the white wine and let it evaporate. Peel the tomatoes, remove the seeds, dice the tomatoes and add them to the pan. After a few minutes, add the mussels (well scraped and cleaned) and let them cook until they open. Season with salt if necessary.

Serve with a drizzle of cold-pressed extra-virgin olive oil.

COOKING WITH WINE

Wine was "discovered" several millennia ago – the Bible presents Noah as the first wine grower in human history – and found its place in the Mediterranean region. Ancient wine was fortified, spiced, dense, and thick with added fragrances. It was definitely a long way from the wine we know today. This precious and intoxicating drink is an almost essential complement to an Italian meal, but it's also a food product itself and a primary ingredient in numerous recipes. The Romans spread the custom of producing and drinking wine to the north, far beyond the confines of the peninsula, where it bumped into the beer cultures of England and Germany. At the time "white winemaking" was preferred, which resulted in a fortified product that was very high in alcohol and resin. The Benedictine monks made the more natural "red winemaking" process popular, probably because of the analogy between the color of blood and the color of the drink, which was essential for celebrating the Christian liturgy. The role of wine in modern cooking can be compared to that of a sauce – its purpose is to enhance the food to which it is added. When used as a flavoring its unmistakable aroma is transferred to the food, so good quality wines of medium age with good body and a peculiar bouquet should be used. For traditional recipes it's always best to use a wine from that area, because just like other ingredients, it's imbued with the taste of the land from whence it came.



CROCCHETTE DI NASELLO ALLE ERBE

HERBED HAKE CROQUETTES

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 45' (preparation: 40 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

1.3 lbs (600 g) hake, about 0.88 lbs (400 g) once it's cleaned
0.44 lbs (200 g) potatoes (about 1 medium)
3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small), finely chopped
3.5 oz (100 g) breadcrumbs (about 1 cup)
5.3 oz (150 g) sliced white bread (about 6 slices)
3 eggs
1 oz (30 g) parsley (about 1/2 cup chopped)
1 oz (30 g) basil (about 3/4 cup chopped)
0.3 oz (10 g) chives
Balsamic vinegar to taste
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Oil for frying as needed
Lettuce (for garnishing)
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Boil the potatoes in lightly salted water. When they're done, mash them with a potato masher.

Skin and fillet the hake, removing all the bones. Wash and mince the herbs.

Drizzle some extra-virgin olive oil in a pan and sauté the onions. Add the hake fillets and let them cook over high heat, using a wooden spoon to break them up. When the fish is done, transfer it to a large bowl. Mix in the mashed potatoes, season with salt and pepper and let it cool.

Remove the crust from the sliced bread and break the bread up by hand. Place it in a food processor with the minced herbs and blend until the mixture is uniformly green.

Shape the fish mixture into 1-inch (3 cm) wide cylinders. Divide them into pieces 2 inches (5 cm) long. Dip them in the breadcrumbs, then the beaten egg and then the herbed bread.

Fry the croquettes in a good amount of boiling oil. Strain them and place them on paper towels to dry.

Serve them on a bed of lettuce and top them with a few drops of balsamic vinegar.



FARAONA BRASATA ALLE VERZE E PORCINI

BRAISED GUINEA FOWL WITH CABBAGE AND PORCINI MUSHROOMS

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 10' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 50 minutes)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) guinea fowl breast
0.44 lbs (200 g) cabbage
0.33 lbs (150 g) porcini mushrooms
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
1 sprig of rosemary
2 garlic cloves
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp minced parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean and rinse the guinea fowl. Season the outside with salt and oil and the inside with rosemary and garlic. Place it in a pan and bake it at 350° F (180° C) for about 30 minutes.

Clean the cabbage and blanch it in salted water for 3 to 4 minutes. Set aside the water.

Clean and dice the mushrooms. Sauté them in a bit of oil with the garlic clove and minced rosemary. Roughly chop the cabbage and add it to the mushrooms. Season with salt and pepper to taste and let it cook for a few minutes. Pour in some of the water from the cabbage.

When the guinea fowl is done, remove it from the oven and divide it into 8 pieces.

Transfer the pieces to the pan of vegetables and let everything stew for about 20 minutes.

Sprinkle each serving with freshly ground black pepper and drizzle cold-pressed extra-virgin olive oil on top.

PORCINI MUSHROOMS

Porcini (porcino *literally means "little pig") are certainly one of the most popular edible mushrooms. Their aroma, appearance, and shape are unmistakable, though identifying mushrooms requires extraordinary skill (and preferably the assistance of an expert mycologist). They grow in all the forests of Italy, especially under chestnut trees, beeches, and oaks. Some areas are especially suited to the development of these treasures of the undergrowth, particularly the Apennines of Parma. Mushroom gathering once provided a notable income to farming families, not to mention an alternative source of sustenance. The* fungaioli *(mushroom hunters) would take to the forests at the first light of dawn, for reasons that were both practical and, in some ways, ritual and propitiatory. Each of them knew where to find one or more* fungaie *(those magical places where mushrooms grow in abundance) and wouldn't reveal the location to anyone – it was a closely guarded secret passed from father to son. Respect for the forest, knowledge of the terrain, and adaptability to the rhythms and variables of nature formed the basis of the delicate equilibrium between humans and their environment, which lasted for centuries.*



FILETTO DI ORATA IN SALSA DI PEPERONE CON FRUTTI DI MARE

SEA BREAM FILLET IN BELL PEPPER AND SEAFOOD SAUCE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 40 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) sea bream
1.1 lbs (500 g) yellow bell pepper (about 2 1/2 large)
0.55 lbs (250 g) yellow onions (about 2 1/2 medium)
1 sprig of thyme
1.1 lbs (500 g) mussels
12 shrimp
1 tsp minced parsley
Salt to taste
White pepper to taste
1 1/2 tsp (8 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Clean and julienne the peppers and onions.

Drizzle some olive oil in a pan over low heat and sauté the vegetables and thyme (stripped from the stem). Add a few tablespoons of water and let them finish cooking. When they're done, purée them and pass the purée through a fine mesh strainer.

Clean and scale the fish. Slice it into fillets and cut each one into 4-inch (10 cm) diamonds.

Scrape the mussels with a brush, flush them out thoroughly and rinse them again. Put them in a pot with just a bit of water over high heat. When they've opened, strain them and remove the shells. Filter the remaining liquid from the pot and set it aside.

Clean and devein the shrimp.

Sear the sea bream in a nonstick pan with a bit of oil, starting with the skin side down. Season it with salt and pepper, then turn it over and cook it on the other side for a couple of minutes.

Remove the fish and deglaze the pan with the water from the mussels. Strain the resulting sauce and mix it with the pepper and onion purée.

Serve the sea bream in the sauce, with shrimp and mussels on the side. Top everything with minced parsley and ground pepper.



FILETTO DI TONNO SCOTTATO CON CAPONATA DI MELANZANE E ZUCCHINE

SEARED TUNA FILLET WITH ZUCCHINI AND EGGPLANT SALAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 45' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

1.1 lbs (500 g) tuna fillet
3.5 oz (100 g) crushed tomatoes
0.88 lbs (400 g) eggplant (about 3/4 medium)
3.5 oz (100 g) zucchini (about 1 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) celery (about 1 1/2 medium stalks)
1.76 oz (50 g) onions (about 3/4 small)
0.88 oz (25 g) black olives (about 6 large)
0.7 oz (20 g) capers (about 2 tbsp)
0.5 oz (15 g) pine nuts (about 2 tbsp)
0.5 oz (15 g) pistachios (about 22)
0.5 oz (15 g) raisins (about 1 1/2 tbsp packed)
1 tsp (5 ml) vinegar
1 tbsp (10 g) sugar
2/3 cup (150 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove
4 sprigs of thyme
1 bunch of basil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Rinse and cube the eggplant. Sprinkle it lightly with salt and let all the bitter liquid drain away for about 20 minutes. Fry it in 2/3 of the olive oil.

Finely dice the onion and celery. Sauté them in a bit of olive oil, then add the zucchini (also diced) and let them brown lightly. Add the raisins, capers, pine nuts and olives. Then add the crushed tomatoes and fried eggplant and season with salt and pepper to taste. Let everything cook for a few minutes. Add the vinegar and sugar, and then finally add the whole pistachios and hand-torn basil.

Cut the tuna into thick slices and season it with salt and pepper. Drizzle some olive oil in a nonstick pan and heat it with the thyme and whole garlic clove. Sear the tuna (1 to 2 minutes on each side) and serve it with the vegetables on the side.

TUNA

"Tuna" is a general term that actually refers to various members of the scombridae *family. It's common in nearly all bodies of oceanic water, though it only comes close to the shore during certain times of year, which vary from place to place. The highly sought-after "red tuna" is one of the largest fish in the Mediterranean. Its delicious taste has led to indiscriminate fishing, which has put the species at risk. Because of this, some countries currently have regulations in place to protect it. But it can't be denied that Mediterranean tuna fishing represents, historically and anthropologically, a bona fide tradition and the true spirit of ancient maritime culture. The infamous* mattanza *(where the last in a series of successively smaller nets is raised to the surface and the fish inside are harpooned) is the final phase of this ritual. Though it may seem a very cruel spectacle to our modern sensibilities, it's been practiced since ancient times and is deeply rooted in an era when the struggle between man and beast was a question of survival. Industrial-scale fishing has disrupted a balance that lasted for centuries, seriously endangering this majestic creature's existence in the Mediterranean. Perhaps by looking to the past, we can open new doors to a more sustainable future.*



INSALATA DI RANA PESCATRICE CON CAPPERI DI PANTELLERIA E ACETO BALSAMICO TRADIZIONALE DI MODENA

ANGLERFISH SALAD WITH PANTELLERIAN CAPERS AND TRADITIONAL MODENA VINEGAR

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

0.44 lbs (200 g) mixed greens
1.76 oz (50 g) carrot (about 1 small)
2.8 oz (80 g) fennel (about 1/3 bulb)
2.2 lbs (1 kg) anglerfish
0.7 oz (20 g) pickled capers (about 2 tbsp)
1 tsp minced parsley
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 tsp (3 ml) Modena balsamic vinegar (aged 12 years)
Salt to taste
White pepper to taste
4-5 mint leaves
12 chive leaves
4-5 basil leaves
1 sprig of marjoram

Method

Clean all the vegetables and greens. Rinse the capers well and strain them.
Clean the anglerfish, removing the skin and bones.

Slice the fish 1/8-1/4 inch (0.5 cm) thick. Sauté the slices with 1/4 of the oil over medium heat. Season generously with salt and pepper.

Arrange the hand-torn greens in the center of the plate. Place the fish on top with the capers and minced parsley. Season with balsamic vinegar, cold-pressed olive oil, salt and pepper.

BALMS AND ELIXIRS

The traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena has been a PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) product for three decades. In other words, its cultural, historical, and gastronomic value has been recognized and considered almost equivalent to archeological or artistic heritage. But it is a very ancient product, documented since at least the 11th century. The first record of this exquisite vinegar, which is still produced in the same areas of Emilia, comes from the monk Donizone, in a work he dedicated to Countess Matilde of Canossa. In the past, the term acetum *referred to an array of acetic condiments derived from the fermentation of must or wine, which were very popular in an era when recipes called for a predominance of sweet or sour flavors.*
As is often the case, this delicacy seems to have been created by accident – its story probably began when a small quantity of cooked must was forgotten in the cellar. The vinegar is aged for years in wooden barrels (juniper, chestnut, oak, mulberry), which imbue the liquid they contain with scents and fragrances – no other aromas are added.
The word "balsamic" comes from balsamico *(balm), which in turn stems from the dual nature of this valuable product – for centuries it was actually used for therapeutic purposes. It was considered a genuine elixir, and perhaps that's part of the reason the producers have always been extremely careful about guarding the secrets of production passed down to them.*



INVOLTINO DI SPIGOLA AL FORNO CON PASSATA DI CECI

BAKED STUFFED SEA BASS WITH CHICKPEA PURÉE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 12′ + 12 h for chickpeas to soak
(preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 12 minutes)

2 sea bass, about 0.88 lbs (400 g) each
8 shrimp
5.3 oz (150 g) chickpeas (about 3/4 cup)
1.76 oz (50 g) onion (about 3/4 small)
2 cups (500 ml) water
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove
Rosemary to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Finely chop the onion and sauté it with a bit of oil. Add the chickpeas (soaked overnight in cold water) and pour in the water, letting them cook until they're very tender. Season them with salt at the very end.

Purée them with a bit of minced rosemary, a dash of olive oil and freshly ground pepper.

Clean, scale, rinse and fillet the sea bass. Season the fillets with salt and pepper and roll them up, placing a shrimp (shelled and deveined, with head removed) in the center of each one. Use toothpicks or kitchen twine to hold them in place. Drizzle them with olive oil and bake them in a preheated oven at 350° F (180° C) for about 12 minutes.

Spread some chickpea purée on each plate. Place the stuffed sea bass rolls in the center and drizzle cold-pressed olive oil on top.



MACEDONIA DI VERDURE MEDITERRANEE CON SGOMBRI GRIGLIATI

MEDITERRANEAN VEGETABLE SALAD WITH GRILLED MACKEREL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 55' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 25 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) mackerel
0.44 lbs (200 g) zucchini (about 1 medium)
0.44 lbs (200 g) carrots (about 3 medium)
3.5 oz (100 g) celery (about 2 1/2 medium stalks)
0.44 lbs (200 g) yellow bell pepper (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.44 lbs (200 g) red bell pepper (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.3 oz (10 g) baby onion
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean the onions and sauté them in the olive oil. Add the zucchini, peppers, celery and carrots (all finely chopped). Let everything continue to cook over high heat for a few minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover the pan and let them cook for another 10 minutes.

Clean, rinse and dry the mackerel. Season the inside with salt and pepper and rub it with a thin layer of olive oil. Grill it over medium heat on both sides and serve it with the vegetables as soon as it's done.

GRILLING

When you cook meat on the grill, you're repeating actions that often had a sacred air in classical civilization. In ancient Greece – as historian and anthropologist Marcel Detienne demonstrated – religious sacrifice often coincided with slaughter and the shared consumption of meat roasted over a fire. The priest in charge of this ritual was called the magheiros *(a name etymologically linked to the Italian* macellaio*, meaning "butcher") and it was his job to slaughter the animal, divide it into pieces (strictly delineated by tradition), preside over the cooking, and finally, distribute portions to the people so the communal meal could begin. This act had an extremely high cathartic value according to beliefs of the time. The blood spilled on the altar and the purifying fire kept all types of contamination and other threats away from the community participating in the ritual. According to some historians, given the underdeveloped nature of the Greek economy and manufacturing practices, sacrifices were one of the few opportunities for citizens to eat meat. And the rhythm of this pagan rite is reproduced at every summer barbecue, in the gestures made and the practice of sharing food.*



ORATA ALLA PUGLIESE
PUGLIA-STYLE SEA BREAM

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 15-20 minutes)

1 sea bream, 2.2 lbs (1 kg)
0.66 lbs (300 g) potatoes (about 2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) Pecorino cheese, grated (1/2 cup)
1 garlic clove, minced
1 tbsp parsley
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean, scale and fillet the fish.

Peel the potatoes, slice them very thinly and blanch them in salted water.

Grease a pan (or line it with parchment paper) and cover the bottom with a layer of potatoes. Combine the Pecorino, garlic and parsley and sprinkle half the mixture evenly over the potatoes. Arrange a layer of sea bream fillets and sprinkle them with salt and pepper. Cover them with the other half of the ingredients, being careful to place the potato slices gently.

Drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil and bake at 400° F (200° C) for about 15-20 minutes.

EATING LEAN

In an era marked by famine, it seems strange that 140-160 days of the year should be for fasting. With the growth of Christianity, a series of norms (initially reserved for hermits and monks, then extended to everyone) also spread, which regulated all aspects of daily life including diet. The "eating lean" requirement made it obligatory to abstain from certain foods (especially red meat and animal fats) on certain days: Wednesdays and Fridays, along with the eves of religious festivals (Christmas and Easter, to name the most important ones) and the period of Lent. Religious liturgy very strongly conditioned Italian eating habits. For example, the opposition between fish and meat, which didn't exist in other cultures (not even ancient Rome), came to be perceived as natural. It also developed two parallel alimentary traditions: one of "lean" foods (fish, oil, vegetables, limited white meat) and another of "fatty" foods (red meat, lard, cold cuts). Cookbooks specified whether each dish belonged to one category or the other at least until the 19th century. But in all honesty both groups gave way to wonderful traditional dishes, because evidently, even though people were asked to abstain, no one ever seriously considered giving up the pleasures of food.



PALOMBO ALLA LIVORNESE

LIVORNO-STYLE DOGFISH

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50′ (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) dogfish steaks
1.1 lbs (500 g) ripe tomatoes (about 4 medium)
5.3 oz (150 g) onions (about 2 small)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove
1 tbsp minced parsley
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Score the tomatoes, blanch them and peel them. Then remove the seeds and dice them.

Heat the oil in a pan and sauté the minced garlic and onion, but don't let them cook enough to start turning golden brown. Add the dogfish steaks and let them cook. Pour in the white wine, let it evaporate and add the tomatoes.

Season with salt and pepper to taste and let it finish cooking. If necessary, add a bit of water. Add the parsley at the very end, just before removing from the heat.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOMATOES

*The history of tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*) is inextricably linked to Italian cooking. Though its American origins are well known, this plant of the* solanacae *family can be considered thoroughly Italian. It was introduced to Europe in the 16th century for it's decorative value, and it was long believed to be poisonous, as demonstrated by its classification in herbalist Pietro Andrea Matthioli's* Libri cinque della historia et materia medicinale *from 1544. Mysterious stimulant and aphrodisiac powers were attributed to the plant, and the name it was given in many European countries alluded to this (it's still contained in the Italian word* pomodoro, *from* pomo d'oro *or "golden apple" and* pomo d'amore, *or "love apple"). For the same reason, small tomato plants were commonly given to women as a message of love in 17th century France. According to some historians, the term was actually mangling of* pomo dei Mori, *or "Moors' apple" and refers to the similar appearance of tomatoes and eggplants (also from the* solanacae *family), a vegetable often used in Arab dishes. Tomato cultivation spread throughout the Mediterranean and found its ideal terrain and climate in the area between Naples and Salerno. But it took a long time for tomatoes to be incorporated into culinary traditions. The first evidence of tomatoes being used for cooking and eating (particularly by those suffering from oppressive famine in Naples) was in the late 18th century. It was tomato sauce that really sparked the widespread success and universal popularity of this fruit. However, the origin of a product is not as important as its integration into the knowledge, necessities, and customs of a population. The "reinterpretation" of the tomato, due to the imagination and intellect of the Italian people, created one of the most emblematic products of Italy.*



PETTO DI TACCHINO ARROSTO ALLE NOCCIOLE

ROASTED TURKEY BREAST WITH HAZELNUTS

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1h (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) turkey breast
1.1 lbs (500 g) broccoli
7 oz (200 g) hazelnuts (1 3/4 cups chopped)
3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small)
2.8 oz (80 g) carrots (about 1 1/2 small)
2.1 oz (60 g) celery (3 1/2 small stalks)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
Broth (as needed)
Cornstarch (as needed)
2 garlic cloves
Sage to taste
Rosemary to taste
Bay leaves to taste
1/3 cup (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Sear the turkey (tied with kitchen twine) in a saucepan with half the oil. Season it generously with salt and pepper. Dice the onion, carrot and celery and add them to the pan with a whole garlic clove and the herbs. Let everything cook for a few minutes. Pour in the wine and let it evaporate. Then place in the oven, preheated to 350° F (180° C). Occasionally add a bit of broth if necessary.

When the meat is done, remove the garlic and herbs and strain the drippings. If necessary, add some cornstarch dissolved in a bit of water to thicken it further.

Now add the hazelnuts (toasted in a nonstick pan and roughly chopped) and let the meat absorb the flavors for a few minutes.

Wash the broccoli, divide it into florets and peel the stems with a potato peeler. Boil it in lightly salted water for 10 minutes. Start heating the remaining oil in a pan with the other garlic clove. Strain the broccoli and add it to the pan. Let it cook for 5 minutes, crushing it with a spoon. Season it with salt and pepper to taste.

Slice the turkey breast and top it with the gravy. Serve it with crushed broccoli on the side.

DRIED FRUIT

Given the current trends, it might be surprising how often dried fruit comes up in a discussion of the "Mediterranean diet." But don't forget that these dietary habits are more about cultural, historical and social customs than nutritional value. During an era when battling starvation was a daily ordeal, and in a geographical area characterized by the scarcity of agricultural terrain and limited livestock, dried fruit became an important staple for Mediterranean populations. It was easily preserved due to the low water content and the fruit was easily gathered in the forests, even by women and children. It was also very nutritious (it's a source of lipids and proteins and provides highly beneficial polyunsaturated fatty acids), which made dried fruit a valuable supplement for the masses.



SAN PIETRO CON PURÉ DI MELANZANE E SALSA AL BASILICO

JOHN DORY WITH EGGPLANT PURÉE AND BASIL SAUCE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 50 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

1.3 lbs (600 g) John Dory fillet
0.88 lbs (400 g) tomatoes (about 2 large)
2.2 lbs (1 kg) eggplant (about 2)
2.6 oz (75 g) red onion (about 1 small)
2 garlic cloves
1 bunch of basil
2/3 cup (150 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Poke a few small holes in the eggplant and insert a garlic slice in each one. Preheat the oven 400° F (200° C), wrap them in aluminum foil, and bake them for 40 minutes. When they're cooked, purée them with 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 ml) of olive oil and a pinch of salt.

Peel the tomatoes, remove the seeds, and dice them. Thinly slice the onion.

Wash and dry the basil leaves. Blend them with 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 ml) of olive oil and a pinch of salt.

Sauté the fish fillets in the remaining oil. Season them with salt, then add the onion and tomatoes.

Arrange some fish and eggplant purée on each plate, and drizzle the basil oil on top.



SEPPIE A ZIMINO

BRAISED CUTTLEFISH

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 15' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 45 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) cuttlefish
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 bunch of parsley
5.3 oz (150 g) onions (about 2 small)
2.5 oz (70 g) celery (about 2 medium stalks)
1 garlic clove
0.66 lbs (300 g) chard
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) dry white wine
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Wash the chard but don't dry it. Put the wet chard (don't add any water) in a covered pot with a pinch of salt. Let it cook for a few minutes.

Carefully clean the cuttlefish and cut them into strips.

Chop the onion, celery, garlic and parsley. Sauté them together in the oil, and when they've turned golden brown add the cuttlefish. Pour in the white wine and let it evaporate. Let everything continue cooking, adding a few drops of water if necessary. When the cuttlefish is very tender, add the roughly chopped chard. Season with salt and pepper and let everything finish cooking.

VEGETABLE GARDENS

Since antiquity, vegetable gardens have played a fundamental role in Mediterranean cuisine, so much so that even today almost every Italian country house has its own garden to draw from when seasonal produce is needed. The vegetable garden first acquired some prestige in conjunction with the monastic culture of the High Middle Ages. Various authors refer to them as a prefiguration of heaven on earth. Christianity is undoubtedly the origin of this enhanced sensibility, more spiritual and poetic than gastronomic, regarding products of the earth. The Italian landscape is decorated with vegetable gardens, their colors, and their borders (large or small). But what did the earth have to offer to the medieval table? Reading the Capitulare de villis *from the Carolingian era, Strabo's* Hortulus, *and Hildegard of Bingen's botanical treatise, the first thing we discover is that gardens at the time contained ornamental (some edible), medicinal, and alimentary plants. The latter includes cucumbers, melon, pumpkin, chard, spinach, onions, leeks, radishes, peas, and above all – cabbage, the undisputed king of the poor and humble kitchen. Herbs were also widely cultivated throughout the Italian peninsula, and their unmistakable fragrances helped to distinguish Italian cuisine from the rest of European cuisine.*



SEPPIOLINE CON PISELLI

SMALL CUTTLEFISH WITH PEAS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) small cuttlefish
5.3 oz (150 g) onions (about 2 small)
1 garlic clove
1 bunch of basil
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp minced parsley
5.3 oz (150 g) tomato purée
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
Salt and pepper to taste
5.6 oz (160 g) peas (about 1 cup)

Method

Clean the cuttlefish and cut them in half lengthwise. Separately chop the onion and garlic. Julienne the basil and mince the parsley.

Sauté the onion with the oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the cuttlefish and the garlic and let them cook for a couple of minutes. Pour in the white wine and let it evaporate. Add the tomato purée, peas, parsley and basil. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper and cook until the cuttlefish is very tender.

ROYAL BASIL

*Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is a worldwide symbol of Italian gastronomy. The herbaceous plant probably originated in India, and tradition says that it was introduced to Europe after Alexander the Great's expedition to that far-off land. Basil gets its name from the Greek word* basileùs *("king") and was known to botanists as the "royal herb," perhaps because of its intense and unmistakable flavor. But the name is all that has remained "royal" about this aromatic plant for some time. In ancient times, basil was thought to have many therapeutic properties and its aroma was considered a potent aphrodisiac. Adorning oneself with basil leaves was considered a message of both love and the desire to please. Perhaps that's why Giovanni Boccaccio, in one of the most harrowing novellas of the* Decameron, *had the desperate Lisabetta bury the head of her lover (who was killed by her brothers) in a pot, from which the young maiden went on to raise a fragrant basil plant with great love and devotion.*



SPIEDINI DI PESCE AL SALMORIGLIO

FISH SKEWERS IN "SALMORIGLIO" SAUCE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 55' (preparation: 45 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

8 scallops
8 shrimp
0.44 lbs (200 g) anglerfish fillet
2 mullet, about (200 g) each (cleaned and filleted)
2 lemons
1 garlic clove
1 tbsp minced parsley
1 tsp fresh oregano
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) water
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Rinse the scallops and shell and devein the shrimp.

Cube the anglerfish and slide it onto the skewers, alternating with the scallops, shrimp and mullet halves.

Start the *salmoriglio* by pouring the oil into a bowl. Add the lemon juice and hot water, whisking vigorously. Add the minced garlic and parsley. Heat it in a double boiler for 5 to 6 minutes, whisking continuously.

Drizzle some *salmoriglio* over the skewers. Grill them, basting with more *salmoriglio* as they cook. Season them with salt and pepper.

Serve 2 skewers per person, topping them with the remaining *salmoriglio*.



TARTARA DI TONNO CON MELANZANE AGRODOLCI E BATTUTO DI CAPPERI

TUNA TARTAR WITH SWEET AND SOUR EGGPLANT AND CHOPPED CAPERS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 35 minutes)

0.77 lbs (350 g) tuna
1 oz (30 g) shallots (about 3 tbsp chopped)
1.76 oz (50 g) pickled capers (about 1/4 cup + 1 tbsp)
1.1 lbs (500 g) eggplant (about 1)
3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small)
1/4 cup + 1 tbsp (75 ml) white wine vinegar
2 1/2 tsp (10 g) sugar
A few mint and basil leaves
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Finely chop the onion and sauté it in a saucepan over low heat with a few tablespoons of oil.

Cube the eggplant and sauté it in a nonstick pan with a bit of oil. Season it with salt and pepper and add it to the onion. Add 2/3 cup of vinegar along with the sugar. Let it finish cooking, seasoning with mint and basil.

Strain the capers, mince them and mix them with a bit of oil.

Dice the tuna and season it with salt, pepper, minced shallot and the remaining oil.

Serve the tuna tartar with the eggplant and the caper sauce.

MINT

Mint is undeniably one of the most meaningful aromatic herbs of Medieval and Renaissance cooking. A quick look through cookbooks of that time period, such Bartolomeo Scappi's (personal chef to the pope) Opera, *is enough to convey the plant's olfactory and gustative importance in many recipes. But as is often the case in the world of gastronomy, there is a rich history and complex symbology hidden behind seemingly casual choices. The story of mint is actually rooted in Greek mythology, and the medical and dietary philosophies of Hippocrates and Galen. Anthropologist Marcel Detienne pointed out the connection between the apparently secondary use of certain ingredients for cooking and cultural aspects of a higher order. For the ancients, there was a link between seasons, agricultural activities, fragrance quality, sacred and profane rituals, eros, and daily eating habits. One version of the Minthe myth is a perfect example: Hades, god of the underworld, was in love with the naiad Minthe, causing Persephone to tear her apart in a jealous rage. So Hades transformed her into the aromatic plant we know today – ordinary in appearance, but with an unmistakable aroma. Perhaps because of this ancient legend, mint is still associated with love and death in Western culture.*



TRANCETTO DI PESCE SPADA CON LIMONE E CAPPERI

SWORDFISH STEAK WITH LEMON AND CAPERS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30′ (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

0.88 lbs (400 g) swordfish steaks
0.88 oz (25 g) capers packed in salt (about 3 tbsp)
5.3 oz (150 g) mache
2 lemons
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Slice the swordfish into 4 pieces. Season them with salt and pepper on both sides and arrange them in a pan that's been greased with extra-virgin olive oil.

Supreme a lemon and dice the pulp, setting aside any juice that is released. Rinse the capers well. Cover the swordfish with diced lemon and capers. Pour the lemon juice on top and drizzle a bit of extra-virgin olive oil.

Bake the swordfish at 350° F (180° C). If it gets too dry, cover it with foil.

Juice the second lemon and combine the juice with the oil, adding salt and pepper to taste.

Combine the mache with the lemon oil dressing and serve it with the swordfish.



TRANCIO DI RICCIOLA IN CROSTA DI MANDORLE E PISTACCHI CON INSALATA DI CARCIOFI

ALMOND AND PISTACHIO-CRUSTED AMBERJACK STEAK WITH ARTICHOKE SALAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 40 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

1.1 lbs (500 g) amberjack steaks
1.4 oz (40 g) capers (about 4 1/2 tbsp)
3.5 oz (100 g) peeled almonds (about 1 cup chopped)
3.5 oz (100 g) pistachios (about 3/4 cup whole)
4 artichokes
1 bunch of mint
2 lemons
1 garlic clove
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Crush the pistachios and almonds. Remove the tough outer leaves from the artichokes. Cut them in half and remove the chokes. Slice them very thinly and put them in water with a bit of lemon juice to prevent discoloration.

Cut the amberjack crosswise into thick slices. Coat them in the almonds and pistachios.

Blend the capers with 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 ml) of extra-virgin olive oil.

Sear the amberjack over medium heat with 1/4 of the remaining oil. Season with salt and bake at 350° F (180° C) for 5-10 minutes, depending on the size of the slices.

Strain the artichokes and season them with the juice from the second lemon, the remaining oil, salt, pepper and finely chopped mint.

Serve the amberjack with the artichoke salad and caper oil.

WHAT'S HIDDEN IN AN ALMOND

The elegant shape of the almond appears as a symbol in all sacred art from the Middle Ages. It was made up of two curved lines that intersected to create a perfect ogive shape, and according to beliefs at the time, the "mystical almond" or vesica piscis *represented the perfect synthesis of the dual nature (divine and human) of Christ. At the same time it was a symbol of the union between two irreconcilable extremes: good and evil, light and dark, male and female, stasis and movement. According to the allegorical perception of the world that was typical of the Middle Ages, a simple almond could evoke this suggestive message. Each little everyday object had a double meaning (real and symbolic). Even this sweet seed, covered in a tough leathery shell, could bear such highly mystical significance.*



TRIGLIE RIPIENE DI PEPERONI CON LENTICCHIE AL PECORINO DOLCE E OLIO ALLE OLIVE TAGGIASCHE

MULLET STUFFED WITH PEPPERS, LENTILS WITH SWEET PECORINO AND TAGGIASCA OLIVE OIL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 55' (preparation: 45 minutes + cooking: 10 minutes)

4 large mullet
0.55 lbs (250 g) red bell pepper
0.33 lbs (150 g) lentils
1/3 cup (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
2.8 oz (80 g) carrots (about 1 1/2 small)
2.1 oz (60 g) Tuscan Pecorino cheese
2.5 oz (70 g) celery (about 2 medium stalks)
2.6 oz (75 g) onion (about 1 small)
1.4 oz (40 g) Taggiasca olives, pitted (about 9 large)
Bay leaves to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean and fillet the mullet.

Roast the whole peppers in the oven, then remove the skin and cut the peppers into slices the size of the mullet. Season them with salt and pepper.

Put the lentils in cold water with the onion, carrots, celery and bay leaf. Bring it to a boil and let them cook until they're very tender. Strain them and season them with salt, pepper, a dash of oil and Pecorino flakes.

Stuff the mullet with pepper slices, placing them between 2 fillets. Season them with salt and pepper and arrange them in a baking dish. Drizzle olive oil on top and bake them for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, blend the olives with 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 ml) of extra-virgin olive oil.

Serve the mullet with the lentils and olive dressing.



ZUPPA DI PESCE
FISH SOUP

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 35'
(preparation: 1 hour 15 minutes + cooking: 15-20 minutes)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) assorted fish for soup (scorpionfish, mullet, tub gurnard, John Dory, cuttlefish, etc.)
1.1 lbs (500 g) mussels
1.1 lbs (500 g) clams
12 shrimp
4 scampi
0.88 lbs (400 g) ripe tomatoes (about 3 medium)
1.76 oz (50 g) yellow onion (about 3/4 small)
1.4 oz (40 g) carrot (about 3/4 small)
1 oz (30 g) celery (about 1 medium stalk)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) white wine
12 slices of bread
3 black peppercorns
3 garlic cloves (1 clove for the crostini, optional)
1 tbsp minced parsley and 1 whole sprig
Hot red pepper to taste
1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
12 3/4 cups (3 L) water
Salt to taste

Method

Scale, clean and fillet the fish. Cut the fillets crosswise into thick slices.

To make a fish broth, put the heads and bones in a pot of cold water with the onion, carrots, celery, 3 peppercorns and a sprig of parsley. Bring it to a boil and let it simmer for about 1 hour, then strain it.

Put the mussels and clams in a pot with a bit of oil, a whole garlic clove and the parsley. Cook them over high heat until they open. Remove the garlic clove and some of the shells, then strain the liquid from the pot.

Heat some oil in a pan. Add the hot pepper, the other garlic clove (minced) and the parsley. Let them cook but don't let them start to turn golden brown. Pour in the white wine and let it evaporate. Add the tomatoes (peeled and diced, with seeds removed). Let everything cook for 10 minutes, then start adding the various types of fish, beginning with those that need to cook the longest. Add the broth and the liquid from the mussels and clams. Let it cook for another 4 to 5 minutes. Finally, add the clams and mussels. Season with salt to taste and serve the soup with a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil.

Garnish with crunchy toasted bread (you can rub it with garlic if you like).

SALADS AND VEGETABLES



The omnipresence of vegetables is undoubtedly one of the most prominent features of Mediterranean cuisine, something that writers, travelers, and early gastronomes had already noted in the Middle Ages.

There are numerous reasons for this culinary custom. First, the widespread presence of vegetables is due to the geomorphological structure of Italian terrain, which does not lend itself well to large-scale breeding (particularly cattle) and thus encourages vegetable consumption. Second, static social conditions kept the majority of the population living in poverty for centuries, making it impossible to obtain food that was higher in quality and protein. In fact, it is well known that meat consumption was a prerogative of the privileged few for a long time. According to some authors, the Italian climate (characterized by long hot summers and little rain) "naturally" and almost instinctively encouraged the Italian people to eat vegetables and herbs instead of meat. In the end, as is often the case, necessity transformed into culture and therefore into certain tastes, uniquely shaping the Italian culinary tradition.

Italians of all social classes learned to love the fruits of the earth. They learned how to work with them and cook them in the most varied ways, and how to utilize every edible part. They even modified the terrain, molding the landscape over the centuries; they conquered every last usable inch of earth in order to grow the most diverse range of products (what we call mixed farming), and production was spread over the longest possible time period. The hard work and efforts of generations of farmers are the foundation of the extraordinary richness we now call "biodiversity."

Among other things, the proliferation of land tracts dedicated exclusively to vegetable and herb gardens is further proof that the Italians' choice of a vegetable-based diet was always a matter of taste. Archidipno, Salvatore Massonio's work of erudition, was published in 1627 and is particularly significant. The title of the Aquilan's curious work came from a neologism (taken from Greek) that emphasized the central role of mixed greens, salads, herbs, roots, fruits, and even flowers, in terms of meals. In fact, according to Hippocratic medical and dietary theories (followed for millennia by the higher classes and, perhaps unknowingly, by the lower classes too), these items are perfect for whetting the appetite.

Vegetables, cultivated in gardens or in the wild, herbs (kept next to the precious spices in the cupboards of the wealthy), legumes, forest floor products like mushrooms and truffles, greens, and even flowers have always received unparalleled attention and appreciation in Italian cooking.

Not only does this gastronomic "style" indicate a close relationship between the high and low classes in terms of sharing and exchanging knowledge about environmental resources, but it can also be interpreted as a sign of profound respect for the earth, which must be reclaimed and renewed, now more than ever.



CAPONATA CON FINOCCHIO, OLIVE E UVA PASSA

EGGPLANT SALAD WITH FENNEL, OLIVES AND RAISINS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

1.1 lbs (500 g) eggplant (about 1)
0.44 lbs (200 g) red onions (about 2 medium)
0.88 lbs (400 g) red bell peppers (about 2 1/2 large)
0.66 lbs (300 g) tomatoes (about 1 1/2 large)
3.5 oz (100 g) black olives (about 23 large)
3.5 oz (100 g) raisins (about 2/3 cup packed)
1 oz (30 g) pine nuts (about 3 1/2 tbsp)
1 bunch of fresh wild fennel
1/3 cup (80 ml) red wine vinegar
1/3 cup (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
2 garlic cloves
0.53 oz (15 g) basil (about 30 leaves)
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean and dice each vegetable separately. Soak the raisins in warm water for 15 minutes, then strain them and squeeze out any excess liquid.

Heat the oil in a pan over medium heat and sauté the onion. Add the eggplant, peppers, fennel and garlic. Let them cook until the eggplant softens, which should take about 10 minutes. Then add the olives and raisins. Add the tomatoes last. Season the vegetables with basil, a handful of salt and a generous sprinkle of pepper.

Cover the pan and let the liquid reduce for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the cover, add the sugar and vinegar and let it continue cooking until the mixture is dense and the vegetables are tender.

Garnish it with basil and pine nuts (lightly toasted in a very hot nonstick pan).

CAPONATA

Like every classic recipe that's deeply rooted in the history of a region and its people, there are dozens of caponata *variations. This traditional dish, a tasty mix of vegetables with a sweet and sour dressing, was often a one-course meal for the lower classes, sometimes accompanied by a chunk of bread. The origins of the name have been blurred over time. Some scholars say that the term* caponata *comes from the undoubtedly aristocratic custom of eating this colorful salad as a side dish with* pesce cappone *(tub gurnard). Others believe that it refers to the cauponae, taverns frequented by sailors, which were lively places that often served "poor man's dishes." They may have been poor, but they certainly weren't lacking in flavor or fragrance.*



CIALDE DI PANE CARASAU CON VERDURE GRIGLIATE E MOZZARELLA DI BUFALA

CRISPY "CARASAU" FLATBREAD WITH GRILLED VEGETABLES AND BUFFALO MOZZARELLA

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 40 minutes)

4 pieces of Sardinian *carasau* flatbread
0.66 lbs (300 g) zucchini
1.76 lbs (800 g) eggplant
1 lb (450 g) 3 ripe tomatoes
0.55 lbs (250 g) buffalo mozzarella balls
Basil, julienned
Extra-virgin olive oil to taste
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean the zucchini and slice it thinly lengthwise. Peel the eggplant and slice it into rounds, then sprinkle it with salt and place it in a strainer for at least 15 minutes to let any bitter liquid drain off.

In the meantime, grill the zucchini on a very hot grill. When it's done, do the same with the eggplant, which should have drained and dried while the zucchini was cooking.

Cut the tomatoes and mozzarella into slices of equal thickness.

Break each piece of *carasau* bread into 3 or 4 pieces and start arranging the ingredients on a serving plate. Start with a piece of bread, then add a slice of zucchini, followed by a slice of eggplant, a slice of tomato and a slice of mozzarella. Drizzle olive oil on top, then sprinkle on a pinch of salt and pepper and a bit of basil. Place another piece of bread on top. Repeat the process until all ingredients are used, which should result in 3 layers. Top each "tower" with a slice of tomato and mozzarella. Drizzle olive oil on top and sprinkle with basil.

***CARASAU* BREAD**

Western culture is marked by the presence of bread in literature, art and even religious worship. In terms of the popular lexicon, idiomatic expressions and popular sayings, every language is filled with references to this food product. Not only does every shape, size and type of bread have a specific name, but the word "bread" (meaning a fundamental component of human dietary systems, which includes every traditional combination of water and flour or water and grains cooked in various ways) is synonymous with "essential nourishment" in the collective consciousness. Carasau is a typical Sardinian bread that's also known throughout Italy as carta da musica *(sheet music). The preparation process, shape and consistency of this bread, which is a large disc that's dry, crispy and very long-lasting, are no coincidence. Easily stored for long periods of time, it was highly practical for the agro-pastoral lifestyle. The recipe evolved through domestic traditions that remained unaltered over the centuries and played a very significant social role in rural communities.*



CIPOLLINE BORETTANE GLASSATE AL MARSALA

BORETTANE ONIONS IN MARSALA GLAZE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 15 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

1.76 lbs (800 g) Borettana onions (about 5 large)
3 tbsp (40 g) butter
3 tbsp (40 g) sugar
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) dry Marsala wine
1 cup (250 ml) beef broth
Salt to taste

Method

Peel and clean the onions, then heat them in a pan with the butter and sugar.

When the sugar has dissolved, pour in the Marsala wine and let it evaporate. Slowly add the beef broth, cover the pan and let it cook on low heat.

Remove the cover towards the end and let the liquid reduce to the desired thickness.

MARSALA: A STORM AND AN ENGLISHMAN

Human actions have not been the only influence on Italian gastronomy – sometimes chance interferes. The story of Marsala, a fortified wine named for its city of origin, is perfect proof. In the late 18th century, an English merchant named John Woodhouse was apparently forced to dock at the port of Marsala during a storm. He had a chance to try a wonderful local wine that really made an impression. It was called perpetuum *because every year the half-empty bottles from the previous year were topped off with the new wine. Woodhouse's keen business sense told him that this wine, similar in many ways to Port or Madeira, would be a hit in England, so he sent several cases home to gauge sales potential. His hunch was correct and made him a fortune, and it probably did the same for the local farmers, who started selling him their own stores. We need to jump ahead to the following century to find an Italian, Vincenzo Florio, involved in the production and sale of this Italian winemaking gem.*



CONDIGLIONE

ITALIAN ANCHOVY SALAD WITH FRESH VEGETABLES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 20' (preparation: 20 minutes)

1.3 lbs (600 g) tomatoes, not too ripe (about 3 1/2 large)
0.44 lbs (200 g) yellow bell pepper (about 1 1/2 large)
0.44 lbs (200 g) cucumber (about 1/2 large)
5.3 oz (150 g) red onions (about 2 small)
1.41 oz (40 g) anchovies packed in salt
1.76 oz (50 g) Ligurian black olives (about 12 large)
4-5 basil leaves
1 tbsp (15 ml) wine vinegar
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) Ligurian extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove
Salt to taste

Method

Rinse the anchovies and remove the bones.

Clean and rinse all the vegetables. Finely slice the onion, cut the peppers into small strips, cut the cucumber into rounds and cut the tomatoes into slices or wedges.

Place all the vegetables in a large salad bowl and add the olives, anchovies (cut in half), hand-torn basil and whole garlic clove (or thinly sliced if you prefer a more intense flavor).

Season the salad with salt, oil and vinegar. Let everything marinate for about 10 minutes, then serve.

ITALIAN DRESSING

The typical Italian predilection for mixed greens, salads and vegetables (raw or cooked) is unquestionable. But reading various works from the past brings another aspect to light, one that is not given enough attention. Vegetable preparation methods, various modes of consumption (even types of chewing) and traditional seasonings and dressings are all based on cultural factors. Bartolomeo Sacchi, also called Platina, was a 15th century humanist and gastronomer. In his treatise De Honesta Voluptate, *he describes the Italian dressing par excellence at length and in great detail: First a generous dose of salt, then high quality oil (distributed generously by hand), followed by a dash of good vinegar. After mixing thoroughly, the vegetables should be left to macerate, allowing the flavors and aromas to mingle to perfection. It's no coincidence that grapes and olives, elements of the famous Mediterranean triad, are combined in even the simplest of condiments.*



CREMA DI FAVE CON CICORIA E MOLLICA FRITTA

FAVA BEAN PURÉE WITH FRIED CHICORY AND BREADCRUMBS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 10 minutes + cooking: 50 minutes)

3.5 oz (100 g) onions (about 1 1/2 small)
1.1 lbs (500 g) fava beans (fresh or frozen)
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1.1 lbs (500 g) chicory
5.3 oz (150 g) stale bread (about 3 1/3 cups crumbled)
6 1/3 cups (1.5 L) vegetable broth
Salt to taste

Method

Chop the onion and sauté it in a pot with 1/3 of the olive oil. Add the fava beans (already blanched and peeled) and let them cook for a few minutes, then add the hot broth. Season with salt and let the beans cook for 30 minutes. When they're done, blend them into a dense purée.

Blanch the chicory in salted water and sauté it in another 1/3 of the olive oil.

Break the bread up into breadcrumbs and fry them in the remaining oil until they are crispy.

Serve the chicory with the fava bean purée on the side and sprinkle the fried breadcrumbs on top.

FAVA BEANS AND PYTHAGORAS

Though legumes were always eaten in abundance in antiquity, especially by the lower classes, the story of fava beans (vicia fava) is curious and, in some ways, mysterious. The philosopher Pythagoras forbade his disciples to eat them, and admission to the School of Pythagoras, which was active in Magna Graecia at the turn of the 5th century BC, required disciples to conform to some very rigid standards, including dietary regulations; Pythagoras is actually considered the first advocate of vegetarianism in the Western world. But the true reason behind the "fava bean taboo" remains a mystery. It could be the result of a purely physical phenomenon – a genetic disorder that results in a serious physical reaction to repeated consumption of fava beans (called favism) seems particularly common in southern Italy. But it's more likely that this bizarre choice was made for anthropological reasons. As Levi-Strauss already noted, fava beans were often involved in ancient rituals connected to the afterlife, perhaps because they have such a smooth stem. So it's plausible that they were considered "demonic" plants linked to the world of the dead and possessing magic powers of communication with the great beyond. Many centuries have passed since the strange ideas of Pythagoras, and Italian culinary history, which features fava beans in many wonderful recipes, has certainly redefined the bean's image.



FIORI DI ZUCCA RIPIENI FRITTI CON ZUCCHINE E OLIO ALLE ACCIUGHE

FRIED STUFFED SQUASH BLOSSOMS WITH ZUCCHINI, OIL AND ANCHOVIES

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 46′ (preparation: 40 minutes + cooking: 5-6 minutes)

12 squash blossoms
6.3 oz (180 g) zucchini (about 1 medium)
0.7 oz (20 g) anchovies packed in oil
3 tbsp (40 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp (15 ml) warm water
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (50 g) flour
Olive oil for frying

FILLING
10.5 oz (300 g) ricotta
2/3 cup (60 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
6 mint leaves, chopped
Salt and pepper to taste

BATTER
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) cold water
1 2/3 cups (200 g) all-purpose flour
1 egg

Method

Clean the squash blossoms and remove the pistils, being careful not to tear the petals. Combine the filling ingredients and mix them with a wooden spoon, seasoning with salt and pepper to taste. Use a pastry bag to fill the blossoms.

Cut the zucchini into small strips and sauté it with a bit of oil, salt and pepper.

Use an immersion blender to purée the anchovies, oil and water. Strain the mixture to remove any bone remnants.

Quickly whisk together the batter ingredients in a large bowl. Lightly flour the blossoms, dip them in the batter and fry them a few at a time. Let the excess oil drip off, then lay them on paper towels. Sprinkle them with salt and transfer them to plates. Serve the fried squash blossoms with the zucchini, drizzling the anchovy dressing on top.



FRITTO DI VERDURE
FRIED VEGETABLES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 35' (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

0.33 lbs (150 g) zucchini (about 1 1/4 small)
0.33 lbs (150 g) bell peppers (about 2 small)
0.33 lbs (150 g) eggplant (about 1/4 medium)
5.3 oz (150 g) Tropea onions (about 2 small)
1.76 oz (50 g) squash blossoms
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) milk
1 2/3 cups (200 g) flour
Extra-virgin olive oil to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Clean and peel the vegetables and cut all except the squash blossoms into thin strips.

Heat a large amount of oil in a large pot.

Dip all the vegetables and the whole squash blossoms in the milk. Dredge them in the flour, shake off the excess and fry them in the oil.

When they've turned golden brown, remove them with a perforated spoon and place them on paper towels to dry.

Sprinkle them with salt and serve them very hot.

VEGETABLE GARDENS

Perhaps the most prominent feature of Mediterranean cuisine, particularly Italian cuisine, is the omnipresence of vegetables. Whether they're wild herbs, roots or garden vegetables, the importance of this component is irrefutable. This characteristic was noted by Giacomo Castelvetro, an intellectual and a man of letters who fled to England after being accused of heresy during the Counter-Reformation. Far from his homeland, he missed the use of vegetables and salads in everyday cooking and pondered the reasons why Italians used those items so much. According to Castelvetro, the first reason has to do with the economic nature and production of Italian terrain, which wasn't made for large-scale breeding. The second reason has to do with climate – the heat and sun of the Italian peninsula aren't conducive to consuming large quantities of meat. These objective geomorphological, economic and structural factors influenced individual and collective tastes, which became subjective, symbolic and cultural over time.



INSALATA DI CARCIOFI CON PARMIGIANO-REGGIANO
ARTICHOKE SALAD WITH PARMESAN CHEESE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 20' (preparation: 20 minutes)

4 artichokes
1 cup + 3 tbsp (120 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
2 lemons
4-5 mint leaves
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Ligurian
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean the artichokes, removing the outer leaves and spines. Clean the stems and soak them in a mixture of water and lemon juice for 15 minutes

Grate or slice the Parmigiano into thin flakes.

Combine the lemon juice, olive oil and a pinch of salt and pepper.

Cut the artichokes in half, and if necessary remove the tough inner fibers. Slice them very thinly and dress them with the lemon and olive oil emulsion.

Arrange the artichokes in the center of the plate. Top them with Parmigiano flakes, hand-torn mint leaves and a drizzle of cold-pressed olive oil.

ARTICHOKES

As Montaigne noted with great surprise in The Journal of Montaigne's Travels in Italy *from the late 16th century, the artichoke* (Cynara scolymus) *is often eaten raw in Italy. Likely derived from the wild cardoon, the Italians' extraordinary agricultural skills and incomparably inventive gastronomy led to the exceptional product that we know today. Once again, humans stubbornly wanted to modify nature, through a series of botanical grafting experiments, to fit their own tastes. The use of artichokes began to spread in the 16th century, and like all little known plants it was immediately assigned symbolic meanings and curious medical and scientific beliefs. For example, the artichoke's reputation as a potent aphrodisiac may be why it was forbidden to young people from good families.*



MOSAICO DI VERDURE CON PECORINO TOSCANO

ROASTED VEGETABLE MEDLEY WITH TUSCAN PECORINO

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 50'
(preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

0.55 lbs (250 g) eggplant (about 1/2)
0.44 lbs (200 g) zucchini (about 1 medium)
0.44 lbs (200 g) yellow bell pepper (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.44 lbs (200 g) red bell pepper (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.35 lbs (160 g) carrots (about 2 1/2 medium)
0.33 lbs (150 g) Tropea onions (about 2 small)
0.26 lbs (120 g) vine-ripened tomatoes (about 1 1/2 small)
0.22 lbs (100 g) Tuscan Pecorino cheese
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Tuscan
Basil to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Wash and slice the eggplant, carrots, onion and zucchini. Cut the tomato into wedges.

Grill the sliced vegetables and whole peppers (which will be peeled later and cut into wide strips). Place them all in a bowl with the olive oil, a pinch of salt and hand-torn basil. Let them marinate for at least 1 hour.

Slice or grate the Pecorino into thin flakes.

Arrange the vegetables in the center of a serving plate. Cover them with Pecorino flakes and drizzle Tuscan extra-virgin olive oil on top.

THE COLORS OF FOOD

High gastronomy in the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Italian Baroque period assigned great importance to an element that, in a way, has only recently been taken into consideration again – the visual presentation of a dish. But in the Middle Ages, it wasn't just a matter of simple aesthetics. Colors actually had very specific symbolic meanings, and even in a culinary context they were a means to a particular end. They were incorporated through the use of ingredients with naturally bold colors and the addition of precious spices (like saffron) or artificial dyes. Regarding the symbolic meaning of various colors, white was associated with purity and balance, and it's no coincidence that even today in Italy people suffering stomach problems are advised to mangiare in bianco *(literally to "eat white food" or follow a diet that's as bland as possible). Red was a symbol of strength, instinct and carnality. Blue was associated with mysticism and ascension. And finally, yellow was the irrefutable king of aristocratic life in the past. As the color of gold and sunlight, it was considered a genuine terrestrial manifestation of the divine.*



PANZANELLA
PANZANELLA

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 15' (preparation: 15 minutes)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) stale rustic Tuscan bread
1 oz (30 g) anchovies
0.44 lbs (200 g) diced tomatoes (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.26 lbs (120 g) seedless cucumber (about 1/2 medium)
5.3 oz (150 g) onions (about 2 small)
0.55 lbs (250 g) bell peppers (about 2 medium)
1 garlic clove, minced
1 tbsp capers, well rinsed
1 bunch of basil
1 tbsp (15 ml) red wine vinegar
1/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil, preferably Tuscan
1/2 tsp (3 g) salt
Black pepper to taste

Method

Cut the bread into 3/4 inch (2 cm) cubes, leaving the crust on.

Finely chop the garlic with the anchovies and capers and put them all in a large bowl. Add the salt, freshly ground pepper, vinegar and oil and mix well. Dice the vegetables and add them along with the bread. Mix again and season with salt and pepper if necessary.

Panzanella is even tastier if you make it the day before and refrigerate it overnight to let all the flavors soak in.

BREAD CIVILIZATION

It's no coincidence that farming culture was defined as a "bread civilization." This food can probably be considered the first complex gastronomic product in human history, and it is a universal symbol of the incalculable distance between Homo sapiens *and other creatures, which are limited to naturally occurring nourishment they cannot modify. Homer defined humans as "bread eaters," as though this seemingly simple foodstuff encompassed all that is meant by "civilization." In the past, therefore, bread was looked upon with an almost sacred respect, also due to the fact that in a subsistence economy, like that of the ancient Mediterranean region, nothing could be wasted. Children were actually forbidden to play with it and break it up into crumbs at the table. It was considered very bad luck to place it on the table upside down. Since Catholics equated bread to the Christ figure, a cross was often cut into the top of bread loaves, both for religious purposes and to facilitate rising. Anyone who threw away bread was actually condemned to a terrible punishment. These few examples are enough to illustrate the historic and anthropological origins of the many Italian dishes that reuse and reinterpret stale bread, in a sort of gastronomic rebirth that is still highly appreciated today.*



PARMIGIANA DI ZUCCHINE

ZUCCHINI PARMESAN

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 20' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 20 minutes)

TOMATO SAUCE
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove
10.5 oz (300 g) crushed tomatoes
Salt and pepper to taste

PARMESAN
1.3 lbs (600 g) zucchini (about 3 medium)
1/3 cup + 1 tbsp (50 g) flour
10.5 oz (300 g) tomato sauce
2 eggs
0.33 lbs (150 g) mozzarella
1 cup (100 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
Extra-virgin olive oil for frying
Basil to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Peel the garlic and heat it in the oil for 3 to 4 minutes, letting it cook but making sure it doesn't start to brown. Add the crushed tomatoes, season with salt and pepper and let it cook on medium heat for 20 minutes.

Wash the zucchini and slice it lengthwise very thinly, about 1/8 inch (3 mm). Thinly slice the mozzarella as well.

Coat the zucchini slices in flour, then egg, and fry them in a large amount of boiling oil. Lay them out on paper towels and sprinkle them with salt.

Spread a thin layer of tomato sauce in a baking dish. Cover it with a layer of fried zucchini, then one of mozzarella. Follow that with another layer of tomato sauce. Sprinkle with hand-torn basil and grated Parmigiano. Arrange another layer of zucchini and continue in the same order until all the ingredients have run out. Finish with a layer of zucchini.

Cover with sauce and Parmigiano, then bake in a preheated oven at 350-375° F (180-190° C) until the surface is golden and bubbling. Let cool for at least 15 minutes and serve.

KING PARMESAN

Of all the Italian cheeses, Parmigiano-Reggiano is without a doubt the most well known throughout the world, fully deserving the title of "king" of cheese products. The different types of Parmesan are still made using a technique that was refined over centuries, which calls for a perfect balance between man, animal and environment. Thanks to the monks who reclaimed the Po Valley and settled in the region, cattle breeding began on a large scale and allowed for large quantities of milk to be set aside for producing this aged, hard, "pasta cheese." To understand the extensive history of hard work and culture behind this extraordinary product, one need only consider that it takes 158.5 gallons (600 L) of milk to make a single wheel. Current scientific studies have only added to taste evaluations, demonstrating that this cheese has great dietary and nutritional value and confirming that it's a good choice for everyday consumption. In fact, Parmesan has been declared a healthy, safe, easily digested and nutritionally balanced product.



POMODORI RIPIENI DI RISO

TOMATOES STUFFED WITH RICE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

1/4 cup (60 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
4 vine-ripened tomatoes
3.5 oz (100 g) Roma or Sant'Andrea rice (about 1/2 cup)
0.7 oz (20 g) oregano (about 3 1/2 tbsp)
4 basil leaves
Half a garlic clove
Salt to taste

Method

Boil the rice in salted water for 10 minutes. Strain it and let it cool.

Cut the tops off the tomatoes and hollow them out. Finely chop the pulp you removed, along with the oregano, basil and garlic. Season the mixture with oil and salt to taste, then stir it into the rice.

Fill the tomatoes with the rice mixture, put the tops back on and arrange them in a pan lined with aluminum foil.

Bake them in a preheated oven at 325° F (160° C) for about 15-20 minutes and serve them cold.

AROMATIC HERBS

When you think about Mediterranean cooking, aromatic herbs are probably one of the first ingredients that come to mind. No other culinary tradition is associated with fresh herbs and fragrances (wild or cultivated) more than Mediterranean cuisine. Though they may seem secondary, a quick look through Medieval and Renaissance cookbooks confirms their gastronomic importance. All that's changed over time is the order and predominance of certain herbs in various recipes. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, mint and marjoram were most prevalent, followed by rosemary, parsley, sage and anise. But today basil rules above all, though in the past it occupied a surprisingly marginal position along with bay laurel, catmint and pimpernel.



RATATUIA
RATATOUILLE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30′ (preparation: 10 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes)

0.44 lbs (200 g) eggplant (about 1/3 medium)
0.66 lbs (300 g) zucchini (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.44 lbs (200 g) tomatoes (about 1 1/2 medium)
0.4 lbs (180 g) onions (about 2 1/2 small)
0.22 lbs (100 g) red bell pepper (about 1 1/2 small)
0.22 lbs (100 g) yellow bell pepper (about 1 1/2 small)
1 garlic clove
4 basil leaves
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Wash the eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes and peppers and cut them into 3/4 inch (2 cm) cubes. Peel and slice the onions.

Put a pan over medium heat and add the oil, whole garlic clove and onions. Let them soften, then add the peppers. After a few minutes add the eggplant, and finally add the zucchini. Let the vegetables cook for a few minutes, then add the tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Let everything finish cooking on low heat, seasoning with hand-torn basil at the end.

VEGETABLES IN MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE

The ubiquity of vegetables is undoubtedly the element that most inspired Doctor Ancel Keys and his colleagues to outline the nutritional and dietary model known as the "Mediterranean diet." The use of herbs and vegetables of every kind has always been a well-known trait of Italian cooking. One need only consider that Liber de coquina, *which dates to the 13th or perhaps even the 12th century, begins with a series of recipes for vegetables. And after all, cabbage, spinach, fennel and herbs have always been featured players in Italian culinary history.*



SFORMATO DI CAVOLO CAPPUCCIO ROSSO

BAKED RED CABBAGE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 30 minutes)

0.88 lbs (400 g) red cabbage
2 tbsp (30 ml) heavy cream
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp + 2 tsp (25 ml) vinegar
0.7 oz (20 g) onion (about 2 tbsp chopped)
0.44 lbs (200 g) mixed greens
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) Modena balsamic vinegar
2 eggs
2/3 cup (60 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
Mixed herbs (optional)
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Blanch the cabbage in salted water with a bit of vinegar, then let it cool and dry.

Sauté the finely chopped onion in the oil. Roughly chop the cabbage, add it to the onion and let it cook for a few minutes. When it's cooled, mix it with the eggs, cream and grated Parmigiano. Season it with salt and pepper to taste.

Transfer the mixture to individual ramekins and place them in a water bath. Bake them in a preheated oven at 325° F (160° C) for about 30 minutes.

Season the mixed greens with cold-pressed olive oil, balsamic vinegar and a pinch of salt. Serve them with the baked cabbage and garnish with herbs.

BITTER LIKE LIFE

If we had to assign one taste to every social condition, the populace would surely choose "bitter," not only because vinegar (which can be considered a sort of "degenerated" wine) has always been a condiment available to everyone but because the preserves and pickled foods habitually eaten by the farmers and lower classes were often made with vinegar. But it should also be noted that the "sour" taste was also historically popular, though the wealthy and powerful always had the option to use the more refined and costly "sweet and sour." Ancient Roman customs called for a small bowl of vinegar at every place on a banquet table so that people could dunk bits of bread between courses and refresh their palates. Nearly all of the recipes of Apicio (the most notable gastronome in antiquity) called for vinegar, and many sauces in the Roman era had an acidic base. But it was also used for therapeutic purposes or added to water to make a restorative drink known as posca. So we can conclude that the "bitter" taste of life is not necessarily unpleasant.



TORTINO DI CARCIOFI E SPINACI

BAKED SPINACH AND ARTICHOKE OMELETTE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 30 minutes)

CAKE
3 artichokes
0.44 lbs (200 g) spinach
2 eggs
1/4 cup (60 ml) heavy cream
1/3 cup (30 g) Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
1 tbsp + 2 tsp (25 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp (15 g) butter
1 tbsp lemon juice
1 garlic clove
Salt and pepper to taste

ZABAGLIONE
1 egg
2 egg yolks
1 tbsp + 1/2 tsp (15 g) sugar
3 tbsp (40 ml) white wine vinegar
1/3 cup (80 ml) water
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Wash the spinach. Clean the artichokes, cut them into wedges and put them in water with lemon juice until it's time to use them.

Heat the oil in a pan with the whole garlic clove. Strain the artichokes and add them, letting them cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Tear the spinach by hand and add that as well, quickly sautéing it. Season with salt and pepper. Add 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 ml) of water and let everything cook over medium heat for 5 to 6 minutes. Remove the garlic and purée everything in a food processor or pass it through a vegetable mill.

Transfer the purée to a bowl and mix in the eggs, Parmigiano, cream and a pinch of salt and pepper. Pour the mixture into greased molds.

Preheat the oven to 325° F (160° C) and bake them in a water bath for 25-30 minutes. Let the omelettes cool before removing them from the molds.

Make the zabaglione while the omelettes bake. Combine the whole egg and egg yolks with the sugar in a pot. Mix well and add the water, vinegar and a pinch of salt and pepper. Heat it over a double boiler, whisking until the sauce doubles in volume and becomes light and airy.

Serve the omelettes hot with the sweet and sour zabaglione.



ZUCCHINE A SCAPECE

MARINATED FRIED ZUCCHINI

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30' (preparation: 30 minutes) + 12 h to marinate

1.1 lbs (500 g) zucchini (about 2 1/2 medium)	1 garlic clove
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) wine vinegar	10 peppercorns
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) water	Extra-virgin olive oil for frying
1 bunch of mint	Salt to taste

Method

Wash the zucchini and cut them into small strips.

Heat a large amount of oil in a skillet and fry the zucchini (a few at a time) until they're golden brown, removing them with a perforated spoon.

Season them with salt and arrange them in a bowl, adding the roughly chopped mint.

Boil the water with the vinegar, pepper and thinly sliced garlic for 5 to 6 minutes. You can alter the water-to-vinegar ratio depending on how much acidity you prefer. Pour the hot marinade over the zucchini.

Once it's cooled, store it in a cold place, preferably the refrigerator. Eat it the next day, serving it cold or at room temperature.

THE STRANGE CASE OF SCAPECE

The recipe for scapece (food that's been fried and marinated) is in the 13th century Liber de Coquina, *and it's one of the many examples of popular dishes that made their way to the tables of the elite. It's a cooking method geared toward the preservation and eventual transport of certain products. Apicio was a Roman cook from the Imperial Age, and in* De re coquinaria *(I, 9) he had already suggested frying fish in oil, draining them and immediately pouring a large amount of vinegar over them. This procedure is still associated with the name of the inventor, and the term* scapece *may come from a contraction of the Latin phrase* esca Apicii, *meaning "food of Apicio." But it's more likely a word of Arabic origin which came to Italy via the Spanish* escabeche. *In the 13th century, scapece appeared on the royal table. It seems that Federico II of Svevia was very fond of fish cooked this way and the royal chef, Bernardo, was an expert at it. Cookbooks from the 14th century place scapece back among the masses, specifically in taverns, where it was called* schibezia a tavernaio *(a bit like saying "tavern-style* scapece*"). The opposite method, called* carpione, *actually transcended social class and was very popular among both the rich and the poor. Bartolomeo Scappi, a 16th century Vatican cook, may have considered fish* carpione *worthy of the pope's dining room, but Montaigne reallocated it to the humble masses when he mentioned an inn in Foligno (Perugia) and commented that it seemed like those places served nothing but marinated fish. The moral of the story is always the same: The wealthy can appropriate popular gastronomic traditions as they please, while the poor are obligated to those traditions by necessity.*

DESSERTS



Although a certain affinity for sweet flavors seems to be present in all of us from birth (perhaps because sweets tend to be associated with the most energetic and caloric of foods), the consumption of foods that are high in sugar has only recently became common practice. From the earliest antiquity, honey was the most widely used sweetener. This precious substance was mixed with grains to make simple *foccaccia*, which was really more of a sweet bread than a dessert, and in Italy there are still an incredible amount of traditional recipes that fall into this category.

But the country has also originated an extraordinary spectrum of exquisite desserts that were born of the same principles but have evolved differently in many places. It's possible to trace some general paths, which are primarily linked to seasonal changes and, to a slightly lesser extent, geographic location. Due to the former, breads were flavored with different ingredients depending on the time of year. Must (often used as a sweetener), chestnuts and dried fruit were used in the fall. Fruits that were dried or candied (preserved) were used in the winter, while dairy products and fresh cheeses were used in the spring. Historical and economic factors have also influenced local customs. In the south there is a prevalence of ricotta, must, almonds, figs and candied fruit, with a common dough base made mostly of wheat flour and olive oil. In the north, on the other hand, the dominant fats are milk, butter and cream, while liqueurs provide the aromatic element and the grains are more diverse (rice, corn and, in some places, rye or buckwheat). The typical flavors are apples, berries, chestnuts, hazelnuts and dried fruits in general. Similarly, raisins and other dried fruits are found just about everywhere.

The true pastry-making revolution coincided with the introduction of sugar, and we can see a turning point in the 17th century. Technical skills became more refined and more complicated recipes were developed (shortcrust pastry, puff pastry, creams), while other recipes were perfected (candies, gelatin, preserves, cookies). The Baroque period was a truly magical time for working with sugar, as monumental sugar paste sculptures called *trionfi* were the centerpiece of every respectable aristocratic banquet. But another aspect of pastry-making history must be addressed – some of the sweets that many would currently place under this gastronomic heading without hesitation were never subjected to such rigid classification in the past. For example, candies, gelatins, preserves and scented water fell midway between "spicing" and cooking. Candies, in particular, were considered to be in the same category as our medicinal pills.

In order to witness the birth of modern pastry-making, we must experience the "gastronomic revolution" – the fall of aristocratic culinary traditions as the middle class asserted itself in this sector, the replacement of French service with the more logical and economical Russian service and the decreasing price of sugar as it became more widespread and popular.



CASTAGNACCIO

CHESTNUT CAKE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 55′ (preparation: 15 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

3 1/2 cups (400 g) chestnut flour
1/3 cup (80 ml) water
2.6 oz (75 g) raisins (about 1/2 cup packed)
1 oz (30 g) pine nuts (about 1/4 cup)
Fennel seeds to taste
2 tbsp (30 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
A pinch of salt

Method

Soak the raisins in hot water for 15 minutes. Strain them, squeeze them and let them dry.

Put the chestnut flour in a bowl with a pinch of salt and slowly temper it with water, whisking continuously, until a smooth and semi-liquid batter forms.

Use some of the oil to grease a cake pan and pour the batter inside. Sprinkle the batter with raisins, pine nuts and a pinch of fennel seeds. Drizzle the remaining olive oil on top.

Bake the cake in a preheated oven at 350° F (180° C) for about 40 minutes.

CHESTNUT CULTURE

Many classical writers – Homer, Theophrastus, Columella, Strabo, Pliny – mention chestnuts and their gastronomic versatility, documenting different techniques for cultivating them and further confirming the practices involved in this agronomic activity. In his De Re Coquinaria, *Apicio provides us with what is probably the oldest recipe for chestnuts. Through the shepherd Tityrus, the great Virgil suggests combining this nut (probably after boiling it in milk for some time) with ripe fruit and fresh cheese. It's a decidedly simple meal, but it's also complete from a nutritional perspective, as evidenced by the fundamental role chestnuts have always played in everyday life in areas with a subsistence economy. In* The Georgics, *Virgil advises grafting chestnuts with beeches to make them more resistant. This is another important confirmation of the close ties between humans and chestnuts, a plant that was avidly domesticated, modified, and manipulated. There are so many variants (dozens for every area where they grow) that it's difficult to give them a scientific classification, though they are generally divided into two comprehensive groups: wild and cultivated. The first are smaller, less valuable, and have harder shells. The second are of a higher caliber, sweeter, and have softer shells that are lighter in color. The Roman poet Martial (1st century AD) mentions the Neapolitans' great skill in roasting chestnuts, proving that humble foods aren't always (almost never, really, unless one is "condemned" to them) lacking in flavor or characterized by unpleasant tastes.*



CROCCANTE DI MANDORLE
ALMOND BRITTLE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 40 minutes)

1 1/4 cups (250 g) sugar
3 1/2 tbsp (75 g) honey
0.55 lbs (250 g) almonds, peeled (about 1 3/4 cups)
2-3 drops of lemon juice
Extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Put the almonds on a baking sheet and keep them in the oven at 125° F (50° C).

Combine the sugar, honey and a few drops of lemon juice into a pot, preferably one made of copper and not lined with tin. Heat the ingredients on low heat until they take on a golden, caramel color. Add the hot almonds, mixing well with a wooden spoon.

Grease a marble surface with oil and pour the mixture onto it. Use an oiled rolling pin to spread it out to a thickness of about 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm). Before it cools, use a heavy knife to cut it into bars. Store the almond brittle in a well-sealed tin.

SWEET AS HONEY

Judging from a Spanish cave painting that dates to 7000 BC, honey was one of the first sweeteners that was deliberately sough out and used by humans. The instinctive predilection for sweets seems to be truly innate, perhaps because nature gave this flavor to the items that were most caloric, and therefore most nutritious. Honey, that sweet gift of nature, was often considered to be of divine origin. In Mediterranean cultures, it often appeared among offers to the gods and was sometimes used to baptize babies, effectively sealing their entry into the collective. In terms of its gastronomic history, honey was not only used for its sweetening properties, but for its notable capacity to preserve other foods, and, especially during the Middle Ages, for the therapeutic properties that are being revalued today.



CROSTATA DI RICOTTA
RICOTTA PIE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 20' (preparation: 40 minutes + cooking: 40 minutes)

DOUGH
1 1/2 cups (200 g) Italian "00" flour
7 tbsp (100 g) butter
1/2 cup (100 g) sugar
1/2 tsp (2 g) baking powder
1 egg
Zest of 1 lemon
A pinch of salt

CREAM
0.44 lbs (200 g) fresh ricotta
2/3 cup (130 g) sugar
3.5 oz (100 g) pine nuts (about 2/3 cup)
3.5 oz (100 g) almonds
(about 3/4 cup whole)
Zest of 1 lemon
2 eggs

Method

Combine the softened butter with the sugar. Add the eggs, grated lemon zest and a pinch of salt. Finally, add the sifted flour and baking powder.

Refrigerate the dough for at least 1 hour. Roll it out to 1/8 inch (3-4 mm) thickness on a floured surface. Lay the dough in a cake pan, lining the bottom and sides.

Sift the ricotta and roughly chop the almonds. Whisk the eggs and sugar together in a large bowl. Add the grated lemon zest, followed by the ricotta, almonds and pine nuts (set aside a few to use as a garnish).

Pour the filling into the dough-lined pan. Arrange strips of dough on top in any pattern you like. Bake it at 350° F (180° C) for about 40 minutes.

Let it cool completely before removing from the pan.

CUSTOMARY DESSERTS

Ricotta-based desserts are intimately linked to the Mediterranean food culture. In fact, sheep farming has always characterized the history of populations along the ancient sea. The three great monotheistic civilizations – Muslim, Jewish, and Christian – offer a considerable variety of recipes for this humble, yet incredibly versatile, dairy product. The ingredients used are a truly triumphant mix of Mediterranean fragrances and aromas: dried fruit, honey, candied products, raisins, etc. Each version offers a taste of its extraordinarily rich and complex past, and each flavor is deeply rooted in history.



GELATINA AL MOSCATO CON FRUTTI DI BOSCO

MOSCATO JELLY WITH MIXED BERRIES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 10' (preparation: 10 minutes) + 2 h to set

1 1/2 cups + 1 tbsp (375 ml) Moscato wine
0.3 oz (10 g) gelatin sheets
4.4 oz (125 g) mixed berries (about 1 cup)
4 mint leaves

Method

Soak the gelatin in cold water. When it's soaked enough, squeeze out any excess liquid. Transfer it to a small pot and let it dissolve in a few tablespoons of Moscato, then stir in the remaining wine. Place a portion of mixed berries in each individual serving bowl or glass and pour the liquid over them.

Refrigerate them for at least 2 hours. Garnish with fresh mint leaves and serve.

GELATIN

The ancient Egyptians likely produced a precursor to gelatin, but it was in the 17th century that the process for making foods – sweet or savory – with that peculiar gelatinous consistency was officially defined. In the pre-modern era, the substances used to obtain similar results were mostly of animal origin: pork rinds, bovine skins, and bones from various animals. Some cookbooks even mention "grated deer antlers." In any case, the recipe for gelatin was born in the realm of the apothecary, halfway between gastronomy, pharmacology, and alimentary alchemy.



GELATO DI PISTACCHIO CON FICHI SECCHI AL MARSALA
PISTACHIO ICE CREAM WITH DRIED FIGS IN MARSALA

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 30' (preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes)

ICE CREAM
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) milk
1 egg yolk, about 1 1/2 tbsp (20 g)
3 tbsp (40 g) granulated sugar
0.7 oz (20 g) unsweetened pistachio paste (about 1 1/2 tbsp)
1/4 vanilla bean

WAFER BOWLS
Half an egg white, about 1 1/2 tbsp (20g)
6 tbsp + 3/4 tsp (50 g) powdered sugar
1 tbsp + 1/2 tsp (25 g) honey
1/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (50 g) all-purpose flour
3 1/2 tbsp (50 g) softened butter

FIGS
4.2 oz (120 g) dried figs (about 3/4 cup)
2/3 cup (150 ml) Marsala wine
1/4 cup (50 g) granulated sugar

GARNISH
Shaved white chocolate to taste
4 fresh mint leaves

Method

Put the milk in a bowl with the vanilla bean. Beat the egg and sugar together, then mix in the pistachio paste. Slowly add the milk, stirring vigorously, and heat it over low heat or in a double boiler until it reaches 183° F (84° C). Let it cool and churn it in an ice cream machine.

Start the wafers by combining the softened butter with the sugar. Add the other ingredients a little at a time until a soft dough forms. Place portions of about 1.4 oz (40 g) in a pan lined with parchment paper and use your fingers or the back of a spoon to spread them into large circles. Bake them at (170° C) until they start to turn light brown. Remove them from the oven and let them cool for a few seconds. Use a spatula to separate the wafers from the parchment paper and place them over an upside down ramekin so they take on a bowl shape.

Make a syrup by heating the sugar and Marsala together. Dice the figs and add them to the syrup, then let everything cool.

Serve the ice cream in the wafer bowls, topped with the fig syrup. Garnish with white chocolate shavings and fresh mint leaves.

ITALIAN ICE CREAM

Doctor Filippo Baldini was the one who suggested dividing the "art of cold food" into sorbets and ice creams (which he referred to as "milk sorbets" because of their milk base) in his book De' sorbetti, *published in Naples in 1775. Once again, a watershed moment in gastronomic history occurred in the 16th century – the arrival of new products and fragrances from the Americas provided a whole world of possibilities for ice cream making. Exotic fruits (like pineapple), products like coffee, cacao, and previously unknown spices (and we can't forget tobacco) gave way to almost unlimited experimentation. For a long time, ice cream remained a delicacy reserved for the wealthy. Even in the 19th century, Vincenzo Agnoletti (author of the treatise* Le arti del credenziere, confetturiere e liquorista*) was particularly admired at the ducal court of Parma because he specialized in ice cream production.*



GRANITA ALL'ARANCIA
ORANGE GRANITA

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 4 h (preparation: 4 hours)

1 cup (250 ml) water
1/4 cup + 2 tbsp (75 g) sugar
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) lemon juice
2/3 cup (150 ml) orange juice
Grated zest of 2 oranges

Method

Carefully wash the oranges and grate the zest of both, being careful not to get any of the bitter white part. Then juice them, filtering the juice with a fine mesh strainer.

Make a syrup by boiling the water and sugar for 4 to 5 minutes. Let it cool and combine it with the citrus juices and orange peel.

Freeze the liquid for about 1 hour, until ice crystals start to form. Whisk it well and put it back in the freezer. Repeat this process at least 4 or 5 times. The granita is ready when the ice reaches a uniform consistency and granularity.

THE SICILIAN GRANITA

Many gastronomic inventions were born from the magical fusion of two gastronomic traditions. Such is the case for the Sicilian granita. *The taste for ice water aromatized with fruits and flowers was typical of both the Roman and Arabic civilizations, and it found fertile ground in the rich and fragrant island of Sicily. Muslim populations also contributed greatly to this process, as they were highly skilled in sugarcane cultivation and production, which was essential for making the syrup that is the base of the* granita *recipe. The wide availability of juicy, tasty citrus fruits did the rest. Vincenzo Agnoletti, who wrote various treatises on making confections, pastries, and liqueurs in the early 19th century, defined this recipe (on the border between gastronomy and physics) as* sorbetto granito, *or "grainy sorbet."*



MELE AL FORNO CON UVETTA E MANDORLE
BAKED APPLES WITH RAISINS AND ALMONDS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 30 minutes)

4 apples, Reinette or Golden Delicious
2.8 oz (80 g) apricot preserves (1/4 cup)
1.4 oz (40 g) raisins (about 1/4 cup packed)
1.4 oz (40 g) slivered almonds (about 1/3 cup)
2 tbsp (25 g) brown sugar

Method

Wash the apples and make a circular incision around the apple with the tip of a knife so they don't burst in the oven. Remove the core with an apple corer.

Combine the raisins and preserves and fill each apple with the mixture. Sprinkle brown sugar on top.

Arrange the apples in a baking dish, sprinkle the almonds on top and bake them at 325° F (160° C) for about 15 minutes.

BIODIVERSITY: PAST AND PRESENT WEALTH

One of the ancients' strategies for resisting the passage of time, and therefore the cyclical return of the winter shortage, was diversification of crops. By making the growing phase last as long as possible, they could reduce the duration of those periods when fresh produce was lacking, which normally occurred during the coldest winter months. The ability to utilize the natural diversity among plants was made possible by human agronomic techniques, rightfully becoming part of the food culture, and giving rise to a rich variety that contributes to the uniqueness of Italian gastronomy today. Ancient cookbooks give long descriptions of pear, apple, olive, legume, and grain cultivars, which ripen at various times of the agricultural year. They also specify the best way to use them in cooking. Today's dominant economic strategies, which aim for uniformity and the highest possible yield, have jeopardized the preservation of the biodiversity that was developed by farming civilizations over centuries. But Italy, with its extraordinary variety of microclimates and productive niches, has managed to partially protect that rich heritage. There are currently about two thousand apple varieties in Italy, and about one thousand of them are ancient and native to the land. It's still possible to taste a bit of history through local fairs, farms scattered throughout the country, and traditional dishes.



MOUSSE DI LIMONI CON OLIO EXTRAVERGINE DI OLIVA

LEMON MOUSSE WITH EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 2 h 30′ (preparation: 30 minutes + 2 hours to set)

MERINGUE
1/4 cup + 2 1/2 tbsp (80 g) sugar
2 tbsp + 2 tsp (40 g) egg whites
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) water

MOUSSE
2/3 cup + 1 tbsp (170 ml) heavy cream
1/4 cup + 2 tsp (70 ml) lemon juice
2 gelatin sheets
1 tbsp + 1 tsp (20 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Start by making the meringue. Heat the water in a small pot with 1/3 cup of sugar. Beat the egg whites with the remaining sugar in a bowl. You can use a whisk, but a beater or a stand mixer would be better. When the sugar water reach 250° F (121° C), slowly add it to the egg whites and keep beating until it cools.

Soak the gelatin in cold water for 5 minutes, then slowly dissolve it over low heat or in the microwave.

Whip the heavy cream and fold it into the meringue along with the gelatin and lemon juice.

Pour the mixture into molds and freeze them for a couple of hours, or until they set. Transfer the mousse from the molds to serving plates and drizzle it with extra-virgin olive oil.



PESCHE RIPIENE ALL'AMARETTO

PEACHES STUFFED WITH AMARETTI COOKIES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 50' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 30 minutes)

4 peaches
5 amaretti cookies
3 tbsp + 2 tsp (20 g) unsweetened cocoa
2 eggs
1/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (70 g) sugar

Method

Wash the peaches and cut them in half. Remove the pits and use a spoon to scoop out a bit more flesh from the middle. Chop them up and mix them with the 2 egg yolks, hand-crushed amaretti and cocoa.

Beat the egg whites with the sugar until stiff peaks form. Fold them into the other mixture you prepared.

Fill the peach halves, arrange them in a pan lined with parchment paper and bake them at 325° F (160° C) for about 30 minutes.

Serve them warm or cold, according to preference.

THE FOOD OF THE GODS

The Aztecs believed that the winged serpent Quetzalcoatl gave man the cacao plant, a divine gift that was central to religious, economic, and ritual life of those lands. Cacao was actually considered a panacea, covering illnesses of both the mind and body. The Native American drank beverages made from cacao mixed with other ingredients, which Gerolamo Benzoni called "a drink more suited to pigs than humans." No impression has ever been so wrong. Cacao was first recorded in Europe in 1544, when a delegation of indigenous nobles offered the king of Spain a dark, dense drink called xocoatl. The first shipment of cacao beans arrived at the port of Seville in 1585 and the Europeans began enjoying hot drinks made from cacao aromatized with spices, vanilla, citrus peels, and (this was the definitive step) refined by the addition of sugar. Drinking cups of chocolate became a trend, and there were even chocolate houses that existed specifically for consuming this delicacy. And from there, cacao continued its victory march unhindered.



SORBETTO DI FRAGOLA
STRAWBERRY SORBET

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 20' + 3 h to freeze (preparation: 20 minutes)

0.55 lbs (250 g) strawberries
1 cup (250 ml) water
3/4 cup + 3 tbsp (185 g) sugar
1/4 lemon

Method

Rinse the strawberries. Wash the lemon, cut it into quarters and squeeze the juice from 1 quarter.

Blend the strawberries with the water and sugar. Add the lemon juice.

Refrigerate the mixture for at least 3 hours. Transfer it to an ice cream maker and let it run until the sorbet reaches a uniform consistency.

THE ANCIENT TASTE FOR SORBET

The custom of eating snow flavored with fruit is very ancient. Limiting ourselves to classical culture, it seems that Athenaeus of Naucratus (a writer from the 2nd-3rd century AD) described a cold drink flavored with pomegranate in the Deipnosofistae, *and Pliny the Younger mentions a frozen cream made with eggs, milk, and honey. These ancient texts tell us that the taste for cold treats dates very far back in time. But it was in the 16th century – helped by the diffusion of sugarcane through the Arabs – that sorbets reached their peak on the tables of the powerful. At the time, every castle and palace had an icehouse (an underground depository or small artificial hill where snow from the nearest mountains, gathered in winter, was stored and preserved). Once again, Bartolomeo Scappi provided the first recipe for Italian sorbet (made with cherries, or sour cherries to be precise) in his* Opera *(1570). In the 17th century, actual sorbet shops were opened (mostly in Venice and Naples) and it started to reach a larger percentage of the population. Contemporary technology did not spark a new desire for sweet, cold delicacies, but simply made it possible for everyone to have some.*



SPUMA DI RICOTTA AL LATTE DI MANDORLA

RICOTTA MOUSSE WITH ALMOND MILK

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h + 8 h to set (preparation: 1 hour)

0.55 lbs (250 g) ricotta
2/3 cup (150 ml) heavy cream
3.5 oz (100 g) almonds (about 1 cup finely ground)
1/4 cup + 2 tbsp (75 g) sugar
2 egg yolks
0.18 oz (5 g) gelatin
1 1/4 cups (300 ml) water

Method

Finely grind the almonds and mix them with the water. Refrigerate the mixture for about 8 hours. Strain the almond milk through cheesecloth.

Beat the egg yolks with the sugar and stir in 1/2 cup (125 ml) of almond milk. Transfer it to a pot on the stove to let the mixture thicken.

Soak the gelatin in water, then dissolve it in the hot almond milk mixture. Let it cool and stir in the sifted ricotta. Whip the cream and fold it in.

Pour it into molds and freeze it. After a few hours, remove it from the molds. Serve it at 41° F (5° C).

IL BIANCOMANGIARE

If there is one dish that's typically European, it's definitely blancmange. It began to spread in the Middle Ages, likely beginning in France, and made its way to all of Europe. However, there was no recipe in the modern sense (a precise ingredient list and a series of steps to follow). We're talking about a gastronomic way of thinking that's radically different from our own: the value of this dish was in fact linked to the color of all the ingredients – white. There are centuries of medical and scientific tradition, and even medieval philosophy, behind this curious culinary choice. According to intellectuals of that time period, every food had particular qualities (associated with color, taste, and consistency) that were absorbed by the eater to the point that it could modify their body and psyche. White represented purity, asceticism, and balance; based on the beliefs of that time period, eating white food meant acquiring those characteristics. Starting in the 11th century, cookbooks present numerous variations of blancmange. Whether it was sweet or savory, the ingredients were always white: chicken, almond milk, ricotta, rice. Interestingly, "descendants" of this lofty predecessor are still found in Sicily and Valle d'Aosta, in two versions of a dessert with centuries of history in every bite.



ZUPPETTA DI AGRUMI AI PISTACCHI

CITRUS FRUIT SOUP WITH PISTACHIOS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 30′ (preparation: 30 minutes)

2 oranges
1 yellow grapefruit
1 pink grapefruit
2 mandarin oranges
1 oz (30 g) shelled pistachios (about 1/4 cup whole)
2 tbsp (25 g) sugar

Method

Use a potato peeler to peel 1 orange, half a yellow grapefruit and half a pink grapefruit. Be careful not to get any of the bitter white pith. Slice the peels into thin strips.

Put the peels in a small pot of water on the stove. As soon as it reaches a boil, turn off the heat and change the water. Repeat this process 3 times.

Supreme all the fruit except for the mandarin oranges (these you can simply peel and separate the segments), using a very sharp knife to separate the fruit segments from the membrane. Keep all the discarded parts and their juice in the refrigerator.

Strain the boiled peels and put the pot back on the heat, adding the sugar and a few tablespoons of citrus fruit juice. Bring it to a boil, then turn off the heat and let it cool.

Blanch the pistachios for 30 seconds so they'll be easier to peel. Then finely chop them.

Distribute the fruit, fruit juice and syrup among individual bowls or cups.

Garnish the soup with peels and pistachios.



BREAD AND FOCACCIA



Bread is real, concrete, ordinary, everyday food, but it's also profoundly evocative, allegorical, and even sacred – no other food can embody all these traits. Bread is a long-lasting food, and therefore a symbol of duration, remaining impervious to history and radical changes.

Bread is the perfect manifestation of the fusion between nature, culture, story, and tradition. Behind this seemingly simple food, there is a monumentally complex history, sociology, anthropology, and culture.

Bread can vary in so many ways – shape, texture, cooking methods, added ingredients, and multiple flavors – that it can be disorienting to trace its origins or map its evolution. In fact, in linguist Gian Luigi Beccaria's recent research on the gastronomic and dietary lexicon, the section regarding the nomenclature of bread – starting with the incredible number of possible variations and arriving at the various uses, situations, and contexts in which it traditionally appears – is dozens of pages long.

Bread can be considered the first example of materials being manipulated and modified through a complex gastronomic process, which is why "eating bread" implies "being human" and preparing it is a civilized act that is simultaneously ideological and symbolic. Similarly, consuming bread inevitably implies a togetherness that instills profound interpersonal ties. Bread is first and foremost a symbol of sharing, and even of universal brotherhood. These concepts are fully reflected in the word "companion," which comes from the Latin com *panis*, literally "with bread," and therefore denotes someone with whom you share bread. Homer divided humanity into two categories: those who eat bread, and those who eat other things (by "other" he meant food obtained through hunting and gathering, that is, food eaten in its original state).

Focaccia – a sister of bread, but not quite the same thing – further enriched the Italian breadmaking repertoire. Some types are strongly linked to agrarian and religious rituals (it was often part of ancient sacrificial offers), but many types of *focaccia* function as basic one-course meals for simple folk, laborers, and travelers. The latter, which is inexpensive and easy to transport, is made by enhancing bread dough with simple seasonings and topping it with "poor man's" ingredients (oil, olives, herbs, and onions).



BOCCONCINI ALLE NOCI

MINI WALNUT BALLS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 35'
(preparation: 30 minutes + 50 minutes to rise + cooking: 15 minutes)

2 1/2 cups (300 g) flour
1 1/2 cups (200 g) strong bread flour
1 cup (240 ml) water
2.8 oz (80 g) shelled walnuts (about 20)
1 tbsp + 2 tsp (25 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
0.88 oz (25 g) brewer's yeast
1/2 tsp malt extract or sugar
2 tsp (12 g) salt

Method

Combine all the ingredients (except the walnuts) in a stand mixer and mix them for 10 minutes, adding the salt at the very end.

Cover the dough with a damp cloth and let it rise in a warm place for 30 minutes.

Roughly chop the walnuts and carefully incorporate them into the dough, either by hand or in the mixer.

Divide the dough into small pieces, just under 1 ounce (24-26 g) each. Roll each piece into a ball.

Arrange the balls in a baking dish. Cover them with a damp cloth and let them rise for another 20 minutes.

Bake them in a preheated oven at 425° F (220° C) for about 15 minutes.

BEHIND THE SIMPLE WALNUT

Over the centuries, some foods acquired an intrinsic symbolic value. Long eaten for its pleasant flavor and the high amount of energy it provided, the walnut is a perfect example. During the Middle Ages, throughout the Christian world (and particularly in Italy), there was a peculiar way of perceiving reality – everything, even the most ordinary everyday object, was seen as a terrestrial reflection of the divine and considered an expression of profound metaphysical meanings. This is how the walnut, an extremely common food with a resistant shell that protects the brittle and tasty nut, became associated with the Christ figure and the general paradoxical nature of humans (a precious and almost ineffable soul locked in the tough skin of the physical body).



FARINATA
CHICKPEA FLATBREAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 25′ + 12 h to sit
(preparation: 10 minutes + cooking: 15 minutes)

3 cups (300 g) chickpea flour
4 1/4 cups (1 L) water
2/3 cup (150 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Mix the chickpea flour with the cold water in a large bowl. Season with salt and let it sit for 12 hours.

Use a perforated spoon to remove the foam that occasionally forms on the surface.

Pour 2/3 cup (150 ml) into a wide, shallow pan. Add the mixture of water and chickpea flour. Mix with a wooden spoon, making sure the oil is uniformly incorporated (the batter should be a few millimeters high, less than 1/2 inch). Place the pan in a preheated oven at 425° F (220° C) and let it bake until the surface is golden brown.

Slice the flatbread and sprinkle it with freshly ground pepper. Serve it very hot.

CHICKPEA FLATBREAD

Chickpea flatbread is one of those foods whose origin and "inventor" are impossible to find. Eaten in many different ways, enhanced by the addition of other ingredients (herbs, vegetables, cheese, or fish), or enjoyed in its own disarming simplicity, it's surely among the foods that are most emblematic of Italian gastronomic culture. There are multiple legends about its origins, further proving the great success of this recipe. According to one of these tales, Roman soldiers were huddled under siege and found themselves using their shields as makeshift pans to cook what little they had (chickpea flour, water, and oil) as best they could. Truthfully, the ancient Romans adored chickpeas, and because they were well known for being economical, easily preserved, and highly nutritious, these legumes were omnipresent in private stores and public warehouses.
The use of a specific cooking utensil – a copper pan – creates the particular consistency and typical crispiness of chickpea flatbread, so tasty that it's become proverbial.



FILONCINI ALLE OLIVE
OLIVE BREADSTICKS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 55'
(preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + cooking: 20-25 minutes)

4 cups (500 g) flour
1 cup (250 ml) water
0.5 oz (15 g) brewer's yeast
1 1/2 tsp (10 g) salt
3 1/2 tsp (15 g) sugar
3.5 oz (100 g) pitted olives (about 23 large)
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Mix the flour, water, oil and yeast. Dissolve the salt in a few drops of water and add it to the mix. Knead the dough for a few minutes, then add the olives (roughly chopped).

Cover the dough with a cloth and let it rise in a warm place for 20 minutes.

Divide it into pieces of equal size and shape them into breadsticks (you should get about 10). Arrange them in a pan lined with parchment paper and let them rise in a warm place until they've doubled in size.

Bake them in a preheated oven at 350-400° F (180-200° C) for 20-25 minutes, depending on the size of the breadsticks.

A THOUSAND TYPES OF BREAD

If Italy is the country of "a hundred cities" and "a thousand bell towers," then there are even more traditional breads to be enjoyed. This food, simultaneously simple and complex, has historically taken on many forms. Though it remains universally recognizable as "bread," it always manifests itself in different flavors with different features. Depending on the socio-economic conditions of where it is produced, the ritual meaning connected to it, and the intended culinary use, bread can be large or small, white or black, tapered, ring-shaped, braided, or an infinite number of other shapes. The creativity of the Italian people has resulted in many different forms of bread, from the basic loaf (whose semispherical shape seems to fit the curve of your hands) to longer shapes (probably a nod to pagan fertility symbols), to the ring shape that recalls a sun disk. Bread still plays a cultural, magical, recreational, and convivial role that is unparalleled.



FOCACCIA DI RECCO

RECCO-STYLE FOCACCIA BREAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 38′
(preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + cooking: 6-8 minutes)

4 cups (500 g) Italian "00" flour
1 1/4 cups (300 ml) water
1.1 lbs (500 g) Crescenza cheese
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

Method

Combine the flour with 1/3 of the oil on a work surface, adding cold water until the dough is very soft. Shape it into a ball and place it in a bowl. Cover it with a cloth and let it rest for 1 hour at room temperature.

Knead the dough for a few minutes and divide it in half. Let it sit for 5 minutes, then roll the first dough piece out until it's very thin. Use your fists to press the dough down further and make it even thinner, almost transparent.

Evenly grease a baking sheet, line it with the dough and cover it with small pieces of cheese. Roll out the second piece of dough, following the same process as the first. Lay it on top and press down around the cheese, creating cavities about 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm) in diameter.

Sprinkle the dough with salt and drizzle it with the remaining olive oil. Spread the oil all over the surface with your palm, pressing down to squash the pieces of cheese at the same time.

Bake the bread in a preheated oven for 6-8 minutes at a very high temperature, about 575° F (300° C), until the surface is golden brown. Cut it into large pieces and serve it immediately.

FOCACCIA: SIMPLICITY AND RICHNESS

Though the Italian expression rendere pane per focaccia *(literally "to give bread for foccacia," meaning to give as good as you get) presumes that these two items are more or less interchangeable, bread and* focaccia *are less alike than they seem.* Focaccia *corresponds to the Latin* mola, *a flatbread made with barley or farro flour and salt, and it is no coincidence that this is the origin of the term* immolare *(immolate). In fact, for the ancients, it was the preferred sacrificial item. It was placed on the heads of enemies who were defeated in battle, and was essential on the sacrificial altar.* Focaccia *was always prepared more delicately than bread, perhaps because it was implicitly linked to the superterrestrial. The dough was made with precious milk and sometimes refined with valuable wines and liqueurs. And while some sort of* companatico *(anything that's eaten with bread) is always a given with bread,* focaccia *is eaten in its own, independent of the table and the availability of other food. Almost every city in Italy has its own recipe for this treat – wherever you go, there's* focaccia, *and wherever you go, it is different.*



FOCACCIA LIGURE
LIGURIAN FOCACCIA BREAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 20′ (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 20 minutes)
+ 1 h 40′ rising time

3 1/2 cups (450 g) Italian "00" flour
1 cup (250 ml) water
1.76 oz (50 g) potatoes (about 1/3 small), boiled and mashed
0.5 oz (15 g) brewer's yeast
2 tsp (12 g) salt
1 tsp sugar
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

TOPPING
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) water
1 tsp (7 g) salt
1 tbsp + 2 tsp (25 ml) extra-virgin olive oil

Method

Mix all the ingredients until a smooth and homogenous dough is formed. Let it sit for 10 minutes, then shape it into a ball and leave it on a work surface to rise for another 30-40 minutes.

Roll it out to a thickness of 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm). Place it in a pan greased with extra-virgin olive oil and let it rise for another 10-15 minutes. Press the dough down with your hands to make sure it covers the entire bottom of the pan.

Prepare an emulsion of water, salt and extra-virgin olive oil for the topping. Use your fingertips to create depressions on the surface of the dough. Spread the emulsion on top with your hands, making sure it gets into all the craters. Let it rise for 80-90 minutes in a warm place.

Bake the *focaccia* in a preheated oven at 475° F (250° C) for about 18-20 minutes.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE POTATO

The potato (Solanum tuberosum) *belongs to the* solanaceae *family. Like its relatives, it came to Europe from the Americas, and its journey to gastronomic acceptance was long, slow, and difficult. The potato earned a shady and dangerous reputation, partially because it grew underground like the "fruit of the devil," which provoked mistrust, and partially because the consumption of tubers (altered by prolonged exposure to light) had caused some cases of poisoning. According to Ottaviano Targioni Tozzetti, potatoes were known in Tuscany at the time of grand duke Ferdinando II, who had them imported and planted in the Giardini dei Semplici and the Boboli Gardens, but only for ornamental purposes. It would be a long time before the potato was accepted as a food item in Italy, and the Piedmont region would play an important role because it was culturally close to France, where potatoes were already popular during the reign of Louis XVI (1754-1793). Though it was well known, the potato was still ignored by Italian rulers and chefs. Only farmers were concerned with promoting the vegetable, assuring that it was economical and nutritious. Even in the 19th century, potatoes had a hard time gaining acceptance. They were considered a food for poor people, and were therefore disdained by the upper classes, who were clearly motivated by status rather than taste. The popularity of potato cultivation in northern Italy is linked to the Napoleonic troops, who at them in large quantities. The culinary and gustative values were finally recognized in the 20th century.*



FOCACCIA PUGLIESE
PUGLIAN FOCACCIA BREAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 3 h 50'
(preparation: 30 minutes + cooking: 20 minutes + 3 hours rising time)

4 cups (500 g) flour
1 cup (170 g) re-milled durum wheat semolina
1 2/3 cups (400 ml) water
1/4 cup + 1/2 tbsp (65 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
2 1/2 tsp (15 g) salt
0.5 oz (15 g) brewer's yeast
2.8 oz (80 g) potatoes (about 1/2 small), boiled and mashed

TOPPING
0.44 lbs (200 g) cherry tomatoes (about 12)
Oregano to taste
Extra-virgin olive oil to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Break up the yeast, mixing it with the flours and 3/4 of the water. When those ingredients are about halfway combined, add the salt, oil, potatoes and remaining water, a little bit at a time.

Divide the dough into pieces, about 0.55 lbs (250 g) each, and shape them into balls. Place them in well-oiled pans, about 7 1/2-8 inches (20 cm) in diameter. Flip the pans over so the bread is underneath and let them all rise for about 3 hours at room temperature.

Turn them right-side up again and press the dough down with your fingers. Top each one with halved cherry tomatoes, a pinch of salt, a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil and oregano to taste.

Let them rise for another 30 minutes or so, then bake them at 425° F (220° C) for 20-25 minutes.

STARTERS

Few remember today, but once upon a time women relied on starters (natural yeast obtained from the previous batch by following a very precise process with attention and care) for making bread. In southern Italy, until a few decades ago, people often went to neighbors, relatives, and friends to borrow a piece of pasta madre *(literally "mother dough"), bringing baked goods or other gifts to give in exchange. This was so common that popular wisdom included the saying,* il levato cammina sempre *(the yeast is always on the move). A tangible manifestation of social bonds, the bread making process and associated domestic rituals powered a cycle of interactions and human relationships that have now been forgotten, rendering the aforementioned saying highly symbolic and evocative. Linked to the processes of transition and change, and traditionally part of the female domain,* pasta madre *still has a lot to teach us.*



GRISSINI ALL'OLIO EXTRAVERGINE DI OLIVA AI TRE SAPORI

EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL BREADSTICKS IN THREE FLAVORS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 28'
(preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 7-8 minutes) + 1 h to rise

4 cups (500 g) Italian "00" flour
0.88 oz (25 g) brewer's yeast
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup (250 ml) water
1 oz (30 g) rosemary, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
0.7 oz (20 g) sun-dried tomatoes, finely chopped (about 3 tbsp)
0.7 oz (20 g) black olives, finely chopped
1 3/4 tsp (7 g) sugar
Cornmeal or semolina as needed
1 1/2 tsp (10 g) salt

Method

Dissolve the yeast in 2/3 cup (150 ml) water. Combine it with the flour, remaining water, sugar and oil. Dissolve the salt in a few drops of water and add it at the very end.

Divide the dough into 3 equal pieces. Mix the rosemary into piece, the sun-dried tomatoes into another and the olives into the third. Cover them each in plastic wrap and let them rise in a warm place until they double in size.

Cut each one into pieces as thick as your finger. Dip them in cornmeal or semolina and stretch them into breadsticks (long or short as you prefer) by hand.

Place them in a pan lined with parchment paper and immediately bake them in a preheated oven at 475-500° F (250-260° C) for 7-8 minutes.

THE MYSTERIOUS ORIGINS OF BREADSTICKS

Legends about the origins of a particular food often crop up after it's become popular. This was the case for breadsticks, a new stick-shaped bread from Piedmont. It seems that the invention, or at least the popularity of breadsticks is linked to the history of the House of Savoy. Young Vittorio Amedeo II (17th century) was in poor health and often suffered from fevers and intestinal disturbances. The court doctors, in keeping with the dietary principles of the time, attributed these problems to the consumption of partially raw bread. So the bakers were asked to produce a new kind of bread: light, pure, healthy, and well cooked (almost like a hard cookie).
But it's more likely (and reasonable) that breadsticks, or grissini*, are simply an extreme version of* gherrsa *or* grissia*, a traditional Piedmontese bread (similar to the baguette that's still so popular in France). But one thing is indubitable – breadsticks were long reserved for aristocratic tables only.*



PANE E PANELLE
CHICKPEA FRITTER SANDWICH

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 5′ (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 5 minutes)

4 cups (400 g) chickpea flour
4 white bread rolls
Water as needed, about 5 cups (1.2 L)
Extra-virgin olive oil as needed
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

In a pot, mix the chickpea flour with the necessary amount of water. Season it with salt and pepper and turn on the heat, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon until the mixture is relatively dense.

Pour it onto an oiled marble surface. Spread it out to a thickness of 1/4 inch (0.5 cm) and let it cool. Cut it into diamonds of equal size.

Fry the pieces in a large amount of boiling oil, strain them and lay them on paper towels to dry.

Serve them immediately in the white bread rolls.

WHITE BREAD, BLACK BREAD

Despite what we've been naively led to believe, bread has never been the food of the poor and humble. On the contrary, to those people bread was a dream. History is full of attempts to obtain bread, or imitate its characteristics and flavors by using lower quality ingredients or substitutes in its absence. The contrast between white bread and black bread (or really, between who ate white bread and who was stuck with black bread) encompasses millennia of social struggles between the powerful and the powerless, the well fed wealthy and the starving masses. This is perfectly evidenced by the custom (common until a few decades ago) of giving a bite of white bread to someone who was dying, almost as if to leave them with one last sweet memory of the life (hard and bitter like the bread they were used to) they were about to leave behind. That's why, in the archaic mentality that still exists in some areas of southern Italy, essere ridotto a pane bianco *(being reduced to white bread) still means that someone is on their death bed.*



PANINI ALLE ERBE

HERB BREAD ROLLS

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 50'
(preparation: 1 hour 30 minute + cooking: 20 minutes)

4 cups (500 g) Italian "00" flour
0.5 oz (15 g) rosemary and sage (about 1/2 cup)
0.4 oz (12 g) brewer's yeast
1 tsp (5 g) malt extract or sugar
1 cup + 2 1/2 tbsp (275 ml) water
1 tbsp + 2 tsp (25 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp (7 g) salt

Method

Finely chop the herbs.

Mix them with the flour, then pour it onto a work surface and create a well in the center. Break up the yeast and add it to the flour. Start mixing, adding a little bit of water at a time. Add the oil, and finally add the salt. Mix until a soft dough forms, then wrap it in plastic and let it sit for about 30 minutes.

Divide the dough into equal pieces (whatever size you prefer) and place the pieces on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Let them rise for about 45 minutes.

Bake them at 350° F (180° C) for about 20 minutes (the time will depend on the shape and size of the loaves).

A WELL IN THE FLOUR

The various bread making methods – movements, utensils, differing shapes – can definitely be considered cultural elements. They are the result of traditions, rituals that often have a specific historical significance, and local customs. For example, Platina (the name by which humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi was known) had no qualms about attributing the phase of "making a well in the center of the flour" to the city of Ferrara. He wrote that the people of Ferrara usually poured the flour onto a work surface, then created a sort of "embankment closed on all sides" and poured the warm water (with salt already mixed in) into the center. The fact that such a connoisseur of gastronomic culture should attribute this bread making practice to a specific area leads to the assumption that Italy, which is full of gastronomic gems, has been home to even more production methods than shapes when it comes to bread.



PIZZA AL TRANCIO

PIZZA BY THE SLICE

Difficulty 2

Ingredients for 4/6 people
Preparation time: 2 h
(preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + cooking: 25-30 minutes)

PASTA
5 1/4 cups (650 g) pizza flour
1 1/2 cups (350 ml) water
1.2 oz (35 g) fresh brewer's yeast
2 1/2 tsp (15 g) salt

SAUCE
1.1 lbs (500 g) crushed tomatoes
0.33 lbs (150 g) mozzarella
3 1/2 tbsp (50 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
Half a bunch of basil
Oregano to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Dissolve the yeast in 1/4 cup + 1 tablespoon (70 ml) of warm water or break it up and sprinkle it into the flour. Mix the flour with the water and yeast. Dissolve the salt in 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 ml) of water and add it to the dough last.

Cover the dough with a cloth and let it rise in a warm place until it doubles in size (about 1 hour).

Roll the dough out on an oiled pan and let it rise again (about 30 minutes).

When it's risen enough, spread the crushed tomatoes (mixed with salt and oregano to taste) on top. Cover it with diced mozzarella and fresh basil. Drizzle olive oil on top.

Preheat the oven to 400-425° F (200-220° C) and bake the pizza for 25-30 minutes. Serve it hot.

THE FAMOUS MARGHERITA

The fate of Margherita of Savoy (1851-1926) was an ironic one. Her name is known and used on a worldwide scale, but not because of her historical role as the queen of Italy. On a visit to Naples, the monarchs were honored with a tri-colored pizza bearing tomatoes, mozzarella, and basil (chosen to match the red, white, and green of the Italian flag). It was a big hit with the queen, and from then on the margherita *became the one and only pizza par excellence. It's strange to think that the blissful marriage of tomatoes and mozzarella only goes as far back as the 19th century, but that was actually the first time they ever came together. None of those involved could ever have predicted that this invention would become one of the most widely eaten and celebrated foods in the world, perhaps even the first truly global food.*



PIZZA FRITTA
FRIED DOUGH

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 35'
(preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + 5 minutes)

4 cups (500 g) pizza flour
1 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (270 ml) water
0.88 oz (25 g) fresh brewer's yeast
1 1/2 tsp (10 g) salt
Oil for frying as needed

Method

Dissolve the yeast in 1/4 cup + 1 tablespoon (70 ml) of warm water or break it up and sprinkle it into the flour. Mix the flour with the water and yeast. Dissolve the salt in 3 1/2 tablespoons (50 ml) of water and add it to the dough last.

Cover the dough with a cloth and let it rise in a warm place until it doubles in size (about 1 hour).

Divide it into pieces, about 3.5 oz (100 g) each. Shape them into balls and let them rise until they double in volume (about 30 minutes).

Place each piece of dough on a floured surface and flatten it with your hands. Fry a few pieces at a time in a large amount of boiling oil.

Remove them with a perforated spoon as soon as they turn light brown. Sprinkle them with a pinch of salt and serve.

PIZZA

There may be no other word that can be considered as global as "pizza." This humble food has an incredible history that saw it spread throughout the world. Considering that it got no attention for centuries, no one could have guessed that it would meet with such great success. Pizza was born as a simple flat disk of leavened bread, topped with whatever was available – mostly olive oil, but also anchovies, other small fish, wild herbs, and later on, tomatoes).
Reading Carlo Collodi's writings from the late 19th century can actually be quite shocking. In Viaggio per l'Italia di Giannettino, *regarding the typical Neapolitan custom of buying and eating pizza on the street, he wrote: "The blackness of that burnt bread, the whitish garlic and anchovies, the greenish yellow of the oil and sautéed herbs, and those pieces of red tomato here and there give pizza a complex air of griminess which is in perfect harmony with that of the vendor." Yet Collodi was wrong.*
Upon reflection, perhaps it was the simplicity of pizza – its openness to every topping and filling (from fruits to vegetables, meat to fish, cheese to tofu), and to interpretation by every culinary culture in the world – that determined its illustrious career.



SCAGLIOZZI
FRIED POLENTA

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 5' (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 4-5 minutes)

2 cups (0.5 L) water
3/4 cup (125 g) cornmeal
Olive oil for frying
Salt to taste

Method

Make the polenta by slowly pouring the cornmeal into boiling salted water (using a copper pot if possible).

Let it cook for about 30 minutes, stirring frequently with a wooden spoon.

When it's done, pour the polenta into an oiled pan. Spread it out to a thickness of 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm) and let it cool. When it's thoroughly cooled, cut it into strips or triangles.

Heat a large amount of oil in a pot. When it reaches a boil, fry the polenta slices until a golden crust forms. Remove them with a perforated spoon and place them on paper towels to dry. Sprinkle them with salt to taste and serve them very hot.

CORN AND POLENTA

Throughout the 16th century, a previously unknown grain from America found a place in the European diet. In its land of origin, corn wasn't eaten in the form that quickly spread throughout Italy – polenta. For centuries, farmers had been used turning flour into a humble mush – hot, nutritious, and easy to prepare – so they did the same with the new arrival. In a way, this is an unwritten rule in every gastronomic system: the introduction of unknown foods is facilitated by the use of known culinary procedures. However, in the case of corn, this had disastrous results. Eating polenta almost exclusively caused the 18th-19th century rural populations of Italy to suffer a terrible epidemic of pellagra. Of course corn wasn't to blame, as it's a perfectly valid food product in terms of both nutrition and economy. It was due instead to the socio-economic conditions that afflicted the whole peninsula. Though it's worth noting that corn was almost entirely absent from the tables of the upper classes – once again, food preferences were conditioned by human ideas rather than the taste of the food itself.



SCHIACCIATINA ALLA SALVIA
SAGE BREAD

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h 42' (preparation: 1 hour 30 minutes + cooking: 12 minutes)

4 cups (500 g) Italian "00" flour
1 cup (250 ml) milk
0.3 oz (8 g) brewer's yeast
1 1/4 tsp (5 g) sugar or malt extract
1 1/2 tbsp (25 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
4-5 sage leaves
Water as needed
1 tsp (7 g) salt

Method

Mix the flour with the malt extract (or sugar) and minced sage leaves. Break up the yeast and add that as well. Start adding the milk, a little at a time, mixing continuously until the dough is smooth and homogenous (if it's too dry, add a bit of warm water). Wrap it in plastic and let it rise in a warm place for 1 hour.

Roll the dough out to a thickness of 1/16 inch (2 mm). Cut it into pieces (any shape you prefer) and lay them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and prick the surface with a fork.

Bake them at 350° F (180° C) for about 12 minutes.

THE OVEN AND OTHER TOOLS

It would be reductive not to consider the importance of tools in gastronomic history. Utensils and cooking implements are actually part of material cultural heritage and have a notable influence on the form, flavor, and consistency of food. Regarding ovens, various types are mentioned in cookbooks: "country," "iron," or "masonry." A useful example can be found in the description offered by the anonymous author of Cuoco piemontese perfezionato a Parigi *(A Piedmontese Chef Perfected in Paris, 1766) in the introductory chapter: "there are two types of ovens, the masonry oven and country oven. They are made of cast iron or copper. They both serve the same purpose; but the masonry oven is always better. To obtain the best results from the masonry oven, one must evenly heat it, clean it, and wait until the heat reaches the desired temperature. Keep it closed so that it remains evenly heated. The country oven is heated by placing the fire below and above, in the appropriate quantity for that which is inside, taking care not to overload it – this oven being made of iron or copper, it is subject to overheating, which could ruin the entire contents." Chefs – and anyone else who cooked in the past – had a kitchen full of tools, some of them relatively complex, and they had to know how to adapt different cooking methods to every type of food, contributing to the definition of Italian cuisine in this sense as well.*



TARALLI AL FINOCCHIO

"TARALLI" COOKIES WITH FENNEL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4/6 people
Preparation time: 1 h 30′ (preparation: 1 hour + cooking: 30 minutes)

4 cups (500 g) flour
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) dry white wine
1/2 cup (120 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
1-2 tbsp (20-30 ml) water
1 tbsp fennel seeds
1 1/2 tsp (10 g) salt

Method

Mix the flour with the white wine, oil, salt, and enough water to create a smooth and elastic dough. Add the fennel seeds, then wrap the dough in plastic and let it rest for at least 15 minutes.

Divide the dough into several pieces and form long ropes about 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm) in diameter. Slice each one crosswise, into pieces about 3 inches (8 cm) long. Shape each piece into a small ring, pressing the ends together.

Bring a pot of salted water to a boil and drop the *taralli* in. Remove them with a perforated spoon as soon as they float to the surface. Lay them on a kitchen towel to dry, then arrange them in a pan that's been oiled or lined with parchment paper.

Preheat the oven to 350° F (180° C) and bake them for about 30 minutes, or until they turn a nice hazelnut brown.

TARALLI

These cookies are characterized by an interesting double cooking process (they are traditionally boiled in water, then baked in the oven). Though the etymology of their name remains a mystery, they possessed a very clear nutritional and cultural value in southern Italy, where the starving population managed to nourish themselves at a very low cost on these simple ring-shaped cookies seasoned with "poor man's" products, which were easy to obtain at taverns or from traveling vendors. The origins of taralli *are bound to the Mediterranean people's innate ability to transform scraps and leftovers into gastronomic delicacies available to everyone. In fact, it seems that taralli came about because of a few creative bakers who decided to turn discarded scraps of already-leavened bread dough into a sellable product. This was an economic advantage and a source of sustenance for those who couldn't afford more sophisticated or costly foods. The bakers flavored the strips of dough with lard, black pepper, almonds, or other cheap ingredients, then shaped them into rings and baked them. And thus* taralli *were born. Today they're still an almost proverbial symbol of the authentic Italian convivial spirit – consider the popular expression* finire a taralucci e vino, *literally to "end with* taralli *and wine," meaning to end on good terms.*

PRESERVES AND LIQUEURS



Human beings have always fought against the natural processes of decay in order to keep certain foods edible and maintain stores for periods of scarcity, cold, and famine. Intelligence and dedication, coupled with empirical observations and techniques refined over centuries, led to a "culture of preserves" that remained largely unchanged until the advent of industrialization, modern refrigeration and freezing, and faster methods of transportation. In a pre-modern subsistence economy, it was also important to produce items that could be traded at local markets. Trading was the only way to guarantee a certain variety in one's daily diet, which would otherwise be reduced to a stifling monotony.

Centuries of profound knowledge about the land and its edible materials, combined with skillful utilization of available resources, led to such a rich variety of "preserved" products that they are still a source of great pride for Italians, and some are well known all over the world. We're talking about cheeses, cured meats, pickled and candied fruits, jams, compotes, and liqueurs – in other words, the pride and joy of the Italian culinary tradition.

Typical preservation methods involve careful control of fermentation processes and highly precise aging techniques. Products may be packed in oil, vinegar, or honey. They may also be salted, dried, smoked, or candied.

Preserved foods are a specialty item, having undergone a specific treatment to keep them edible (even if they've been altered in form, consistency, or flavor) for a certain amount of time. They exist at the crossroads between high gastronomy and the culture of "country" cooking.

The need to stock up in preparation for periods of scarcity and fill the pantry with foods that have an extended shelf life is typical of a mentality driven by the nightmare of famine. But over time, popular wisdom brought about the skills and techniques that helped preserved food products shift from the sphere of necessity to that of pleasure and flavor.

For centuries those humble kitchens were condemned to a tedious and repetitive existence in the absence of choice and variety, but there was certainly no lack of great taste.

Modernity has brought innovative preservation methods based on technology and the latest scientific discoveries, but it has not led to the disappearance of old-style preservation. On the contrary, it's been rediscovered under the guise of local specialties and gastronomic delicacies. It is a genuine piece of cultural heritage that Italy has had the wisdom and fortune to cultivate, in part because it fell behind other European countries in terms of industrialization.

From an international standpoint, the phenomenon of globalization has further favored the rediscovery and increased value of these wonderful products, which can restore the feelings, proportions, and most of all, the flavor of a life closer to home.



ACCIUGHE SOTTO SALE
SALT-PACKED ANCHOVIES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 2 h (preparation: 2 hours + 1 month to stand)

4.4 lbs (2 kg) anchovies
2.2 lbs (1 kg) coarse salt

Method

Clean the anchovies, removing the head so that you pull out all the innards with it. Anchovies that will be packed in salt should not be rinsed, as this would compromise the preservation process.

Spread a layer of coarse salt in the bottom of a large glass container that's been thoroughly cleaned and completely dried. Arrange a layer of anchovies, placing them head to tail to maximize the space. Top them with another layer of salt, about 1/3-1/2 inch (1 cm) high.

Continue with another layer of anchovies, perpendicular to the previous layer. Continue until all the anchovies have been used. Cover them with lots of salt – there should be no empty space between anchovies.

Place a round cover of glass or wood (with a diameter slightly smaller than that of the container) on top. Then put a weight on top of that, about 4.4 lbs (2 kg), so the fish are well compressed.

Keep the anchovies in a cool, dark, dry place.

They'll be ready to eat in 1 month.

PRESERVED ANCHOVIES-THE UNIVERSAL SEASONING

*The anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicholus*) is undoubtedly one of the best examples of so-called "blue fish," a definition that includes various species of small fish with iridescent scales that move in large schools and create a hypnotic swirl of blue and silver reflections. During the reproductive period (April-September) anchovies are easily caught in enormous quantities along the Mediterranean coast, especially in the Adriatic Sea, the Gulf of Genoa and the Strait of Sicily. This is why the anchovy has played such a large role in Italian cuisine, whether it's fresh or preserved in oil, vinegar or salt. The ancient Romans adored a particular sauce called* garum*, which was made with anchovies and other "blue fish." There were many variations, but the recipe was largely the same for all of them. The fish was finely chopped or reduced to a pulp and left to macerate and ferment in the sun. The resulting liquid was filtered and used as an ingredient in numerous recipes.* Garum *was very expensive because production required a great deal of time and attention. It was a fundamental ingredient for the ancients, and the skill level of a professional cook could be determined by his ability to measure it perfectly for use in fish dishes. Tastes have now changed and* garum *has disappeared, along with ancient Roman gastronomy in general, though traces can still be found in* colatura di alici*, a traditional salted anchovy sauce produced on the Amalfi coast.*



MELANZANE SOTT'OLIO
EGGPLANT MARINATED IN OIL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 1 hour)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) eggplant (about 2)
2 cups (0.5 L) wine vinegar
2 garlic cloves
Extra-virgin olive oil to taste
1 bunch of basil
Oregano (fresh or dried) to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Wash the eggplant and slice them 1/8-1/4 inch (5 mm) thick. Place the slices in a strainer, sprinkle with salt and let them drain for about 1 hour.

Bring the vinegar to a boil, then add the eggplant slices for a few minutes. Strain them and lay them out on a cloth to dry.

Arrange them in jars with a few basil leaves, sliced garlic and a pinch of oregano. Cover them with oil, let it settle and top it off if necessary. Seal the jars well and keep them in a cool, dark, dry place. They should last for a few months.

EGGPLANT MADNESS

*Eggplant (*Solanum melongena*) is very common in modern cooking, especially in southern Italy, but it wasn't always that way. The etymology of the Italian name* melanzana *(from the Latin* mala insana*, meaning "mad apple" or "apple that causes madness") clearly illustrates the opinions held about this vegetable in the past. Eggplant originated in India and was probably introduced to Europe by the Arabs throughout the 12th century. Castore Durante, a 16th century doctor, described two species of eggplant in his* Herbario Nuovo*. The first was red-violet while the second (now almost impossible to find) was white or yellow. Based on medical science at the time, the author further emphasizes the low opinion of eggplant, writing that eggplant consumption causes intestinal pain and digestive problems and induces melancholy, headaches and bad coloring. But he goes on to explain that, despite this, eggplant (or* petranciani*) is widely eaten in Italy (boiled, fried, pickled or cooked like mushrooms), and he admits that it's rather pleasing to the palate. It's worth noting that like the tomato, eggplant was also known as* pomo d'amore *(love apple) and considered an aphrodisiac that induced lust. It earned a bad reputation as a symbol of insanity during the Renaissance, which remained until taste-based motives finally overruled the real insanity – the prejudice against eggplant.*



POMODORI IN VASO PER SALSA
TOMATO PRESERVES FOR SAUCE

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h (preparation: 1 hour)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) San Marzano tomatoes (about 16)
Basil to taste
Salt to taste

Method

Wash the tomatoes and score them with a knife. Drop them in boiling water for 30 seconds, then remove them with a perforated spoon and immediately put them in a bowl of ice water to make removing the skin easier.

Cut them in half, sprinkle them with salt, and let them drain. Dice them and put them in hermetic jars, adding a handful of basil. Close the jars.

Wrap the jars in towels to keep them from breaking and arrange them in a large pot. Add enough water to cover them and bring it to a boil. Let them boil over low heat for 20 minutes.

Let the jars cool in the water, then check to make sure they're all properly hermetically sealed. Keep the tomatoes in a cool, dark, dry place and they should last for a few months.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TOMATO SAUCE

The key to spreading the popularity of tomatoes, a symbol of Italian gastronomy, was turning them into sauce. They were considered purely ornamental at first, but the tomato eventually made its way into Italian culinary traditions through the "back door" as a universal condiment, and this versatility is what made it popular. Lazzaro Spallanzani was the first to note that the fruit preserved well when reduced to a paste, boiled and stored in jars. French cook Nicolas Appert recorded that procedure in his 1809 treatise, L'art de conserver les substances alimentaires, *a revolution in food preservation techniques. Peter Durant applied Appert's method to cans, giving rise to the industrial production of canned food. The association (now taken for granted) between pasta, pizza and tomato sauce was a result of the widespread availability and low cost of these canned products. The first tomato processing plant was built in the second half of the 19th century, while the first mention of tomato sauce in a cookbook was in 1839 when Ippolito Cavalcanti, the Duke of Buonvicino, took a practice that was probably already common – the consumption of pasta with tomato sauce – and included it in the second edition of* Cucina teorico pratica. *As usual, popular cuisine and clever intuition came together to create a pairing that is known and loved throughout the world.*



POMODORI SECCHI SOTT'OLIO
SUN-DRIED TOMATOES MARINATED IN OIL

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 25' (preparation: 20 minutes + cooking: 5 minutes)

10.5 oz (300 g) sun-dried tomatoes (about 5 1/2 cups)
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) water
3/4 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (200 ml) white wine
1/3 cup + 1 1/2 tbsp (100 ml) wine vinegar
3 1/2 tsp (15 g) sugar
1 bay leaf
1 tsp peppercorns
1 tsp coriander seeds
Extra-virgin olive oil to taste
1 tbsp (20 g) salt

Method

Put all the ingredients in a pot except for the tomatoes and oil and heat the mixture. When it reaches a boil, add the tomatoes and let them cook for 5 minutes.

Strain them and lay them on a towel to dry. Put them in jars and cover them with oil. Hermetically seal the jars. Keep them in a cool, dark, dry place and they should last for a few weeks.

SEASONALITY: A CONTEMPORARY MYTH

The human concept of utopia has always involved a world freed from the confines of time. Eden, Earthly Paradise, the Land of Plenty – all are constructions of the imagination that mostly follow the same criteria: Eternal springtime and a surreal abundance of food and natural wonders. The modern world is relatively detached from seasonal relationships, considering them a more or less noticeable change in meteorological conditions and landscapes. But in the past, the cycling of seasons was experienced with great anxiety. Human cultures tried their best to influence the weather and temper its effects, particularly those regarding edible materials.
Preservation techniques are part of this strategy, calling for various solutions designed to prevent the decomposition of resources that are only available during a particular season (especially summer) so that they could be eaten at any time of year. Today, preserved foods are a source of gastronomic pride in Italy. They are fundamental ingredients in many recipes and even the main players when it comes to appetizers. Perhaps we don't reflect on this much, but modern preservation methods (freezing and refrigeration) are much more respectful of the true flavors of foods than ancient methods, which altered their form, consistency, aroma and flavor. The addition of salt, oil, honey, vinegar, herbs and spices causes certain changes, which is the very reason that preserves are now enjoyed as a gastronomic delicacy in their own right. It follows that the continued efforts to return to local seasonal products, surely healthier and better from a nutritional perspective, entails a radically new way of looking at food and an important change in image.



CONFETTURA DI FRAGOLE

STRAWBERRY PRESERVES

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 40' (preparation: 10 minutes + cooking: 30 minutes)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) strawberries
4 cups (800 g) sugar
1 tbsp (15 ml) lemon juice

Method

Clean and rinse the strawberries and set them out to dry on a kitchen towel.

Cut them into small pieces and put them in a large pot with the sugar and lemon juice. Let them cook for 30 minutes, stirring continuously.

Test the density by putting a few drops of the liquid on a ceramic plate and tilting it. The liquid should be relatively dense and gelatinous, and it shouldn't run too quickly.

Pour the liquid into glass containers (which should be kept in a 200° F (100° C) oven until this point), then immediately close them and turn them over to create the vacuum seal that will allow for a longer shelf life. Leave them upside down until they have completely cooled, then store them in a cupboard. If kept in a cool, dark and dry place, the preserves should last 1 year.

QUEEN CRISTINA OF SWEDEN'S STRAWBERRIES

*The strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), which ripens in the spring, was a fixture on the tables of ancient Rome during the festivals dedicated to Adonis, the personification of vegetation in classical mythology. According to legend, when the beautiful young Venus died, Adonis began to cry, and from his divine tears came strawberries, small fragrant fruits the color and shape of a heart. The intense and particular flavor of strawberries has always been appreciated, especially at sophisticated feasts. Bartolomeo Stefani, head cook for the Gonzagas in the 16th century Court of Mantua, served "strawberries in white wine" in honor of Queen Christina of Sweden on November 27, 1655. At Baroque banquets, appreciation for strawberries was combined with the desire to surprise the guests with something unexpected, or even improbable. This was easy for those who, like the House of Gonzaga, had fast transportation and vast economic resources. And it was easy for those like Stefani, who was highly skilled, knew the Italian terrain perfectly and fully understood the seasonal characteristics of the most desirable products. He knew how to obtain the rarest produce on the Italian market, or any other market. Serving strawberries in November was a show of the host's power and wealth. In the past they were a symbol of privilege, but today almost anyone can find such products from any place during any season. Could this shift in terms of prestige have caused the recent return to "buying local?"*



PESCHE SCIROPPATE

PEACHES IN SYRUP

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 2 h (preparation: 2 hour)

2.2 lbs (1 kg) hard yellow peaches
2 cups (400 g) sugar
1 vanilla bean
Peel of 1 lemon
2 cloves
2 1/2 cups (600 ml) water

Method

Bring a pot of water to a boil and drop the peaches in for 1 minute. Remove them with a perforated spoon and immediately put them in a bowl of ice water so the skin will be easier to remove (you can skip this step if you're using nectarines).

Cut them in half, remove the pit, and lay them on a clean kitchen towel to dry.

In the meantime make the syrup. Dissolve the sugar in the water. Let it boil for a few minutes with the vanilla, strips of lemon peel, and the cloves (to be removed later).

Arrange the peaches in hermetic jars and pour the syrup over them. Close the jars.

Wrap the jars in towels to keep them from breaking and put them in a large pot.

Add enough water to cover them and bring it to a boil. Let them boil on low heat for 30 minutes.

Let the jars cool in the water, then check to make sure they're all properly hermetically sealed. Keep them in a cool, dark, dry place and they should last for a few months.



LIMONCELLO
LIMONCELLO

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 1 h + 1 month and a half to age (preparaton: 1 hour)

6 Sorrento lemons (untreated)
2 cups (0.5 L) alcohol, 180 proof
1 cup (250 ml) water
1 cup + 2 tbsp (225 g) sugar

Method

Wash and dry the lemons. Use a potato peeler to remove the yellow part of the rind. Put the pieces in a hermetically sealed jar and cover them completely with alcohol. Keep it in a cool, dark place for 2 weeks, shaking it every day.

Make the syrup by dissolving the sugar in the water and letting it boil for a couple of minutes. Let it cool and add it to the alcohol and peels. Mix well and strain it with cheesecloth. Pour it into bottles and store it in a cool, dark place for at least 1 month before consuming it.

Keep the limoncello in the freezer and serve it ice cold.

CITRUS FRUIT IN ITALY

Citrus fruits originated in East Asia but they've become a symbol of a splendid Italian island – Sicily. The gastronomic history of these fruits is both complex and intriguing. The general category of citrus includes several varieties from the citrus genus, each one with its own particular story. The Romans certainly seemed to be familiar with citron and lemon, at least in the late Imperial Age, as evidenced by the extraordinary mosaic in the Villa at Piazza Armerina in Enna. The bitter orange came to Sicily during the period of Arab rule (9th-11th century), where it was celebrated for its decorative and ornamental value only. Perhaps that's why citrus fruits are still referred to as giardini *(gardens) in Sicily. During the era of great geographic discoveries (15th-16th century), the sweet orange would finally arrive in Europe. It was first acclimatized in Portugal, and from there it made its way to Italy; the popular name* partugal *or* purtualli *harks back to this journey. In any case, oranges were cultivated in Calabria and Sicily in the 16th century, if we are to believe Leandro Alberti's accounts of his travels there.*
The many varieties of citrus fruits that we know today are not naturally occurring but rather the result of grafting, selection and modification. The original plants were in fact too sour and poisonous to be consumed. Once again, alimentary history teaches us that patience and respect can balance the stubborn human desire to modify nature.



NOCINO
WALNUT LIQUEUR

Difficulty 1

Ingredients for 4 people
Preparation time: 10' + 40 days to age (preparation: 10 minutes)

12 green walnuts in their shells
4 1/4 cups (1 L) red wine
1 1/4 cups (250 g) sugar
1 cup (250 ml) alcohol, 180 proof
1 pinch of cinnamon
1 clove
Zest from 1/4 lemon (only the yellow part)

Method

Cut the walnuts into quarters and combine them with the other ingredients in a hermetically sealed jar. Keep it in a cool, dark place for 40 days.

When 40 days have passed, filter the liqueur with cheesecloth and store it in well-sealed bottles.

GATHERING WALNUTS

The richness of Italian gastronomic culture lies not only in the infinite variety of recipes or the celebration of authentic flavors but in the fact that it's so closely tied to centuries-old traditions and rituals. Such is the case for the liqueur known in northern Italy as Nocino and in some areas of southern Italy as a merecina *(medicine) because it's considered a panacea for all digestive problems. In the past, this miraculous elixir was prepared in accordance with local beliefs involving popular magic and ritual blessings. For example, on the night of the feast of St. John, which coincided with the summer solstice, women went barefoot into the forests to gather the unripened green walnuts. The expert of the group, who possessed ancient wisdom, chose the best walnuts. They were placed in wicker baskets and left out in the open until the next morning so they would receive the purifying dew of the solstitial night. According to herbology (once again anticipated by popular culture), this short period of time corresponds to the period when walnuts possess essential oils, sap and vitamins in higher quantities. On that same magical night, herbs were gathered for filters, medicines and potions according to practices that were halfway between popular medicine and witchcraft. Propitiatory and divinatory rites were also performed, using water and plants. These decidedly pagan traditions are so firmly rooted in Italian culture that many regions still celebrate the night between June 23-24, going out to "catch the dew" and eating stuffed pastas with, of course, green herbs.*

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Inaugurated in 2004, **Academia Barilla** is located at the Barilla Center in Parma and provides 27,000 square feet (2500 square m) of space for teaching professional chefs and restaurateurs and Italian food lovers how to recognize and utilize the best Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) products, protecting them from fraud and misuse. There are nearly 100 courses on the art of Italian gastronomy, from raw ingredients to historical heritage, technique and table service. Academia Barilla is the ideal point of departure for enogastronomic tours that guide participants in discovering the Parma area, and it's also equipped with the vast Gastronomic Library that is open to the public and houses a valuable collection of historic menus and prints.

Todd English is one of the most decorated, respected, and charismatic chefs in the world and has enjoyed a staggering number of accolades during his remarkable career. He has been recognized by several of the food industry's most prestigious publications, established two of the best-known restaurant brands in the United States (Olives, Figs), published three critically acclaimed cookbooks (*The Olives Table, The Figs Table* and *The Olives Dessert Table*), and is a four-time James Beard Award winner. His television credits include some travel and cooking series of great success.

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In 2010, the Mediterranean diet was added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. It's a lifestyle that goes beyond simple nutrition, calling upon history, culture, biodiversity, the social and ritual aspects of food and standards of lifestyle and behavior.



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